This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

VOL. I.

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

BY

THE HON. MRS. ALFRED MONTGOMERY.

"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou! my guide and mine acquaintance."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1872.

The right of Translation is reserved.

250. g. 264.

LONDON :
PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE,
BLENHEIM STREET, OXFORD STREET.

TO

MY FAIR DAUGHTERS,

MRS. FINCH

AND THE

MARCHIONESS OF QUEENSBERRY,

THESE VOLUMES ARE

Dedicated.

MINE OWN FAMILIAR FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOAT AND THE HOME.

SURROUNDED by wide, alluvial meadows, where the large red oxen grazed knee-deep in rich grass, spangled with king-cups, stood the quaint old house called Moreton Moat. It was a large, square building, flanked by two low, round towers, and clothed in green and orange lichen, that clung to the walls like an inherent part of the great stones of which it was built. Here and there parts of the house were mantled in ivy, some centuries old, and with huge twisted stems, that could hardly have been removed without dragging with them the wall that was their support. Just as

in man's life, the heart that yields shelter to a fond but weaker nature becomes so welded to the other that, though it be the weaker one that fails the first, the other sinks down and follows, for the strength of weakness is to cling and make severance impossible. Huge buttresses supported the thick walls of the massive building, and here and there tufts of green fern hung from their slanting sides, like a wreath flung down by Nature's lavish and careless hand to decorate the venerable old house.

A wide moat reflected the checkered walls in its still bosom. Lilies poised their white cups and broad leaves on the tremulous surface of the water; a few swans sailed noiselessly in and out among the aquatic plants that grew on the edge of the smooth lawn, just where it dipped into the moat, or skirting the wet sides of the house wall, expecting to be fed.

The drawbridge had long ago ceased to be moveable, and being no longer necessary as a means of defence, had been decorated with

stone vases filled with bright flowers, and formed now the principal entrance to the house.

Beyond the moat lay a large, well-tended garden, with low-branched cedars, contrasting their dark boughs with the light green leaves and silvery stem of the plane-tree. Here and there a majestic beech made a bower beneath the shade of melancholy boughs; and beyond the garden in the park were long lines of majestic elms, toppling their great heads against the red light of the evening sky, and casting huge slanting shadows across the meadow, and upon the red and speckled cattle that stood by the banks of a canal. In the distance, rising above the dome-like elms, tall poplars pierced the heavens like the spires surmounting the heavy roofs of a large town. And on the waters of the canal crept the lazy barge, with the wet flags and heavy creek of the rope that the patient horse was dragging, and resembling some large water-beetle swimming asleep on its native element.

Moreton Moat had belonged, for many genera-

tions before our story begins, to the old barons of Moreton; but the family seemed destined to die out, leaving no heir to either the name or the property. The Lord Moreton of our story was an only child, and so far followed in the footsteps of his father, that, like him, he succeeded in wasting his fortune without having anything to show as the result of his careless expenditure; and probably had any one interrogated him as to what had become of a property never very large, but lying well together, naturally productive, and valuing about ten thousand a year, the noble lord would have been less able to give a satisfactory answer than the poorest herdsman on his estate. He did not gamble, he cared only moderately for racing; though he kept, it is true, a small, well-ordered racing stud, and for many generations the Moretons of Moreton Moat had been looked upon as the more probable winners of the gold cup at the annual races held near the town of Burton.

But though the present Lord Moreton, and

his father before him, had shown no particular tastes which, either by their expensive refinement or riotous wastefulness, could readily account for their ultimate ruin, they had a way of letting money slip through their fingers, and passing out of their own hands into those of their dependents and hangers-on, that might soon have dissipated a larger revenue than any the Moretons could boast. And so it came to pass that when the last lord was carried down into the large, cold, stone chamber where the Moretons, man and wife, had been buried in ghastly pomp for some centuries past, in the neighbouring parish church of West Lynn, his lordship's debts were found to be somewhat heavy, and the property was announced for sale under the will of the deceased, instead of devolving to the half dozen very distant and obscure cousins, to whom otherwise it would have belonged.

Whatever may have been the impression produced amongst his lordship's friends, there was no surprise felt by the tenants, or by the neigh-

bours, when it was found that Mr. Falkener, the late lord's agent, came forward to purchase the estate, that he and his fathers before him had governed and administered for so many centuries. And in doing so, it was not the whole of the Moreton property that Mr. Falkener had to pay for. The last lord and the preceding one had had uncontrolled power over the estate, and whenever either was in want of a good sum of ready money, Mr. Falkener was always prepared to advance it, upon the ruinous condition of mortgaging a few fields that lay just beyond his own paddock—a snug farm-house where he wanted to locate his widowed mother; and so on, from time to time, through two generations, until, on the last lord's death, Mr. Falkener was found already the owner of a good half of the landed property, and with a large sum of money in hand, anxious to purchase the remainder.

John Falkener had been born on the estate, and was foster-brother to Hugh, Lord Moreton, and father of the last Baron. Patronized by the family from his birth, he had received a

solid and excellent education. He was taken into the house at the age of eighteen, as accountant to Hugh's father, Edward, Lord Moreton, who died just as his son came of age. From that he became secretary to his foster-brother; and finally, at the age of twenty-seven, he was made agent of the whole estate. He riveted his claim on the family by marrying a very prim and singularly uninteresting young lady, some five years his senior, who had been, and was, when he married her, companion to Lady Moreton. There being then no children in the family, and Lord Moreton absorbed in sport, or county meetings, or other occupations utterly uninteresting to his wife, she had found her days somewhat tedious, and finally had engaged a spinster lady of the name of Jane Chester, to do cross-stitch with her in the morning, and play drafts in the evening.

John Falkener, secretary to his lordship, was a fresh-looking, well-grown young man, whom any damsel might have been excused for considering agreeable and pleasing—even perhaps

a damsel so much his elder. Anyhow, it so happened that when, of an evening, Lord Moreton, sipping his port-wine after dinner, sent for Mr. Falkener, to ask him some question, and take a glass while he answered it, and then, rising, would suggest that he might as well follow him into the drawing-room, and pay his respects to the ladies, Mr. Falkener never refused; and the usually pallid Miss Chester invariably blushed as that gentleman made his appearance.

Lady Moreton's somewhat monotonous life had made her untimely an old woman in her habits and modes of thought. Moreover, she was herself five years older than her lord, which no doubt was one reason why, when she found it out, she thought Miss Chester had done so perfectly right in falling in love with John Falkener. And so, at the comparatively early age of thirty-five, Lady Moreton invariably exchanged the cross-stitch for knitting, as soon as the lights were brought in, that she might, she said, spare her eyes. And very quick and very

sharp was the glance of those bead-like black eyes, surmounting a small beak-shaped nose, that her ladyship raised to the suffused face of poor Miss Chester, on the occasion of Mr. Falkener's evening visits.

The click, click of her ladyship's knitting-needles, which till then was often the only sound that broke long intervals of silence, would come to a sudden standstill; and, at last, after three or four successive occasions on which Miss Chester's best feelings nearly overcame her, the good-natured lady would drop her ball of worsted to give her companion an opportunity of stooping to recover it, and so of hiding her blushes for a moment under the table-cover.

At length Lady Moreton resolved, after grave and serious cogitations, to speak to Miss Chester on the subject. But before doing so she first consulted her husband. He had begun by ridiculing the whole affair, and almost refusing to believe in it.

"What nonsense, my dear!" said his lordship. "John Falkener is far too good-looking a man

to mean to marry an old maid like Jane Chester. Why, there is Mary Savile, the parson's daughter, glancing at him over the high walls of her father's pew every Sunday, while the parson is pouring forth on the vanity of life and the uncertainty of human happiness. And you will allow that Mary Savile's bright black eyes and raven braids are worth ten of Jane Chester, with her straw-coloured ringlets."

"I should be sorry, Hugh, to suppose that such trivial questions as the colour of a woman's hair had anything seriously to do with Mr. Falkener's choice. I should have a very poor opinion of him if I thought that that silly hoiden could have arrested his attention for one moment. I have never approved of Miss Savile, as you are well aware; while, on the contrary, Miss Chester has for many years been the inmate of my house, and I really think we may say a friend of the family. I am far from looking upon her as an old maid," added Lady Moreton, bridling up as she spoke with a certain air of asperity, as if

remembering her own age when she accepted the hand of her younger lord and master. "Jane Chester is just at the age when all a woman's charm is most in perfection, and when she combines the elasticity of youth with the sound judgment and powers of conversation of more mature years."

"Very well, my dear, if you think so, and if John thinks so, I have nothing more to say about it. I think Miss Chester an excellent person. I make no doubt she will prove a capital housekeeper to poor Falkener, especially as you have had the training of her. And if it is to be, I shall be happy to buy the *trousseau*, give the wedding-breakfast, and a present of three hundred pounds for re-furnishing John's house into the bargain. I leave the whole thing to you. You see to it; you settle it. I don't want to be bothered. Let John have her if he likes it."

And so saying, Lord Moreton caught up his hat and stick, lying on a pile of papers that Mr. Falkener and he had been conning over that

morning, and somewhat impatiently left the room.

Lady Moreton attempted no further remark. She felt she had been somewhat "put down," and that too on a subject on which she considered herself more able to form a correct judgment than almost any other—namely, a question of individual character, and of how far this person was suited to such another person.

Like most narrow-minded individuals, she was possessed with the idea that she saw deeper than her neighbours. She had, in her own opinion, an unerring appreciation of the qualities of every one who came beneath her notice. She weighed them each and all in the balance, and knew exactly who was found wanting. And when once she had written down a name with a white mark she seldom altered her mind as to that person's most unquestionable merits; while, if you had the misfortune to get into her ladyship's black books, not an angel from heaven, with a special revelation to the contrary, would have availed to get you out again.

It must be acknowledged that this peculiarity (if indeed it be one, instead of being, as we suspect, a very common form of character) had its advantages. She made a fast friend; and, as she was on the whole too good-hearted not to be more often friend than foe to those who came within her circle, she did more good than harm by her tenacity of feeling.

There was only one individual, amongst all those intimately connected with the family, about whom Lady Moreton had never been able quite to make up her mind to her own satisfaction, and that was John Falkener. It might be that a little feminine jealousy entered into the question. Lord Moreton referred to Mr. Falkener upon every possible question, took his advice, and was led by his opinion far more frequently than Lady Moreton quite approved. She had found them fast friends when she first met Lord Moreton; but it had never struck her that the land-agent and the foster-brother of her husband could possibly interfere with her influence. She was glad Lord Moreton had a man of business

in whom he could place such well-deserved confidence, and who was necessarily so intimately acquainted with all that concerned the management of the estate. She expressed her satisfaction on the subject to all who would hear her, and was ever ready, in the first year of her married life, to convey her dignified and well-merited approval of Mr. Falkener.

But as time wore on she was less profuse in her expressions. Mr. Falkener's name was allowed to pass without comment. She was never heard to blame him, but his praises were not sounded so loudly.

The fact was that as time wore on, and gave her more insight into her husband's character, she discovered a long and deep-rooted tie over which she had no control, which she was not supposed to notice, and which might have been considered to be altogether out of her province, but which, in point of fact, was at the bottom of all Lord Moreton's actions, all his opinions, and most of his affections. Lord Moreton was a man of a reserved disposition, and whose

feelings were rather tenacious than warm. He cared for few people; those he did care for he thought, for the very reason that they had won his regard, beyond all possibility of being doubted. But then it was for himself that he cared for them—for what they were to him, for the use he made of them, for the enjoyment they brought him, and because they were his friends. You might have put before him the character of the noblest and finest nature that ever lived, and he would have felt no particular attraction to that man in the abstract, and simply on account of his virtues. But the man *he* had chosen and cared for, that man was all that was valuable. The rest were leather and prunella!

And so Lord Moreton and John Falkener, his foster-brother, born on the same estate, one as heir, the other as the agent's son, lived together in a closer way really, though not externally, than do many sons of the same parents.

The very fact that John was his inferior and

dependent endeared him to Lord Moreton. He could as such make more use of him, and it was for this that he wanted friends. Their sympathy, their aid, their companionship, he wanted for himself. And when he had got it, he kept it with tenacity and repaid it with liberality; and never for a moment guessed that he was selfish in his affections, and that this very selfishness made him (like so many other men in a superior position of wealth and fortune) choose his friends from those a little beneath him.

By degrees the mystery unrolled itself before the eyes of the young wife. Lord Moreton was too much of a gentleman ever to obtrude upon his wife John Falkener's opinions, or John Falkener's advice to himself. But from time to time Lady Moreton, when discussing family and intimate questions with her husband, would perceive that there was, that there *must be* some influence at work besides her own, independent of hers, and which, somehow or other, generally carried the day. At first she sup-

posed, when she met with opposition, that it took rise in her husband's own mind, and was his own spontaneous thought. She would therefore endeavour to contravene it, and impress him with her contrary views. But ever and anon she found herself, the further she pushed matters, suddenly brought, as it were, face to face with a stone wall, beyond which there was no passing. And that stone wall was always—John Falkener.

At first she tried to circumvent the wall, or even to overtop it. Once, and once only, she tried to undermine it. That was an attempt never to be repeated, and never to be forgotten.

Lord Moreton had stood before her white with rage. He had sworn a great oath—and he had never sworn before in her presence, for he was a chivalrous man—and had said something very bitter about her being a fool to suppose that *her* influence or her opinion could change him towards the man who was his friend years before he had ever set eyes on her, or heard her very name.

And so for the future, and on to the very last, Lady Moreton had to make up her mind to the fact that somewhere in her domestic life, rising up behind her husband, there was a stone wall; and that beyond that barrier not all her woman's wit, nor a hundred times her woman's charm, could by any possibility be got to pass.

Lord Moreton's dislike to the idea of John Falkener's marrying Jane Chester arose from a twofold cause. First, he honestly thought her beneath him in attractiveness and intrinsic worth. He would have liked to see his foster-brother rise by the alliance he made, and not go on in the same groove by marrying his wife's *dame de compagnie*. The rector, Mr. Savile, came of a good and noble family; and even if poor Mary's black eyes had occasionally wandered over the high ridge of the sort of penfold in which, in common with other sheep of the congregation, she sat ensconced during her reverend father's rather weary discourses, there was really no reason to accuse her of ill conduct or hoidenishness. She was an only child, and

besides being a good connexion for Falkener, would have a little money—only a little, to be sure; but then Jane Chester had none. Besides, Lord Moreton had got used, painfully used, to Jane Chester. He was weary of her silent, prim, uninteresting ways. Those straw-coloured ringlets looked always as if suffering from a damp atmosphere, and it is possible Lord Moreton felt they reflected upon the proximity of the moat; that moat he was so proud of, and which ill-judged people had dared to say made the house damp.

She was by no means a cheery woman to his mind, and sometimes he would try and compress a simper out of her when in vain he had endeavoured to extract a hearty laugh by some jest rather broader than usual. He did it with a sort of bravado, as if to see whether beneath that very pale and prim exterior there might possibly lurk a little mischievous fun in placid Jane Chester.

Altogether, while too good-hearted actually to despise her, he was inclined to think her a poor creature; and, on the whole, would have

liked her better had she been less estimable, and betrayed the smallest possible approximation to having, as he expressed it, a spice of the devil in her.

To his mind, his admirable John Falkener deserved a wife of another stamp. And then, on the other hand, why did he want to marry at all?

"I shall miss him," thought Lord Moreton, "of a winter's night, when I want him to come and prose over some questions concerning the farms. I can't call for him on a summer's evening, when I want him to stroll into the stables with me, and give me his opinion about a horse. Capital eye for a horse has Falkener, as good as my own. And no wonder, for he has seen as much of them as I have, ever since, boys together, we used to go and play in the stables, and talk slang with my father's grooms. And now he must needs go and marry, foolish fellow! Ah, well! I did it myself, so I suppose I must not complain. Only the case is very different; and anyhow I wish he would marry something

younger and prettier than Jane Chester."

And yet whatever there was of beauty, and romance, and divine poetry in this quiet courtship and in this approaching marriage, lay entirely hidden away in the bosom of poor despised Jane Chester.

Lord Moreton begrudged her his companion, and his dependent. Lady Moreton patronized the whole concern, because it gave her a golden opportunity of exercising that mixture of benevolence and self-conceit which is so often apt to take the place in human actions of real Christian charity. Moreover, she would not altogether lose the power of occasionally having recourse to Jane Falkener in the same way, though in a different degree, as she had done with her when *dame de compagnie*. And beneath all this there was another lurking feeling, hidden low down among so many more avowed motives that it is doubtful if Lady Moreton herself fully acknowledged it. This feeling was a secret hope that by retaining Jane's confidence she might more often get at John Falk-

ener, and influence him before he influenced her husband, and learn through the wife those secrets she could not otherwise arrive at.

Mr. Falkener himself had calculated long and deeply before he gave himself up a willing captive to Jane's artless charms. There had been no precipitancy in his feelings, no heedless passion, no rash haste; and if the god of love had had anything whatever to do with it, for once he had acted with his eyes open. There was one thing better in Falkener's eyes than beauty, wit, or love, or anything woman could give—and that was to keep his footing at Moreton Moat. Not Lord Moreton himself loved those lichen-covered walls with half the passion they inspired in John Falkener. Every blade of grass on the lawn, every annual ear of corn in the rich harvest fields, every homestead, every barn, was an idol in the heart of John Falkener. He was born there. He had lived there without ever leaving it. The boundaries of that estate were the boundaries of the world to him. He loved it, not as the owner loved it, but as

the man who covets alone can love. His very affection for his patron and his foster-brother was, in a sense, only a reflection of his love for Moreton Moat. Lord Moreton belonged to the estate in John Falkener's mind. He was the necessary and inevitable owner of it, and so had a worth and a value he would not have possessed anywhere else.

He was not a dishonest man; and yet if there be, as we think there is, a shade of difference, it would be hard to say he was altogether an honourable man. Covetousness is akin to dishonour; and so through the long monotonous years of his stewardship, albeit he had never robbed his master of a single farthing, yet he had allowed him, without any strenuous effort to hinder it, to do foolish things which hampered the estate. He did not remonstrate when he saw his patron imprudently bent on some extravagance which further on would have to be paid for by the sale of a field or a copse. Only when the moment came it always so happened that it was John Falkener who had the

money his lordship wanted, and who bought the property his lordship was compelled to sell.

And Lord Moreton had even been heard to say, "Sooner to you than to another, John. Perhaps my heir may be able to buy it back again, and I know you will let him have it then." As he said it, he believed it; and John Falkener would smile and bow his head, and that passed for an assent.

Meanwhile Jane Chester looked and loved. She thought the world did not contain a nobler or a more admirable man than John Falkener —so wise, so judicious, and so gentle! She was a little afraid of him though, for his gentleness was not free from a certain chill which might go on into sternness. But she thought that if only he would marry her she would be so devoted that it was impossible he could be stern to her. In her humble way she built castles in the air, not of the pleasures he would open to her, and the presents he would make her, and of how he would adore her; but quite simply she dreamt of how she would make his home com-

fortable, see his dinner well prepared, nay, cook it herself, if need be, and for ever be rewarded by a smile from those thin chiselled lips, and by the lighting up of that fine brow and of those clear, dark grey eyes.

And so she made a god of John Falkener, and was well content to hope to be his slave. And all the while her simple soul was a laboratory of gentle thoughts, out of which emanated all kinds of good, and pure, and self-devoted feelings, to the honour and glory of her one perfect man. Were we not right in saying that all the divine poetry that could come into this courtship came from the despised Jane Chester?

In the deep embrasure of a mullioned window which opened on the moat, and through which wafted the faint breath of the lime-trees, and the ringing metallic screams of the stately peacock, spreading his myriad feather eyes in the hot sunshine, as he stalked along the wall of the drawbridge, sat Lady Moreton and Jane Chester, on the day succeeding the conversation we have reported above. Jane, as usual, was com-

pleting the embrazonry of the Moreton coat of arms in Berlin wool, intended to form the seats of a set of high-backed carved oak chairs that stood in the hall. Lady Moreton was reading, with apparently deep interest, the morning paper. But ever and anon she raised her eyes, and quietly and intensely scanned the pale features of patient Jane Chester.

At length the paper was laid on her lap, and after a gaze more scrutinizing than ever, but which melted into softness as she began to speak, she said abruptly,

"My dear Miss Chester, I have found out something about you."

Jane looked up startled, and blushed, but said nothing.

"Yes, my dear, I have found out a secret, which I daresay you thought no one could possibly know but yourself."

The blush grew deeper as Jane Chester tried to articulate an inquiry as to what her ladyship could mean.

"I have found out," continued Lady Moreton,

"that you are not indifferent to John Falkener."

There was a brief pause; and then, in rather a trembling voice, and without raising her eyes, or ceasing from that eternal tent-stitch, Jane replied—

"I am sorry your ladyship has found it out—I only hope no one else has."

"And why should you be sorry?" rejoined Lady Moreton, rather quickly. "Who ought to know it sooner than an old friend like myself?"

"Oh! dear Lady Moreton," answered Jane—and this time the grey eyes, suffused with tears, and deepened by emotion into blue, looked up full into her friend's face—"I did not mean that at all—I only meant, I was sorry if I had made a fool of myself, and allowed my feelings—my absurd—my thoughts," added she, settling down at last into the least compromising expression, "to betray me."

"Very sorry for what, you little fool?" said Lady Moreton, with a cheery laugh. "And

pray why should you not fall in love as well as other young women, I should like to know?—particularly when you have made such a very wise and unexceptionable choice as Mr. John Falkener. I don't see that you could do better, my dear, and I am very glad you have done so well. I am sure you could not have chosen a more estimable man," said Lady Moreton, after a short and scarcely perceptible pause, "than Mr. Falkener; and grieved as I shall be to lose you, I could not have done so under more favourable circumstances; for at the 'Home'" (the name by which John Falkener's pretty ornamental cottage was known) "you will not, after all, be much further than the garden gate."

In vain had Jane Chester more than once endeavoured to check this flow of words. Lady Moreton always said her say to the very end when once she had been set in motion; and not till the sentence had come to a close could Jane stammer out some deprecatory statement, to the effect that she had no reason to believe

Mr. Falkener cared for her—that he had never said so; and finally poor Jane was overwhelmed with the fear that, somehow or other, by those stupid blushes of hers, she had betrayed herself, and that everybody—John Falkener included—would necessarily despise her.

Lady Moreton said a great deal to console her on the subject, and asserted that *she* knew John Falkener's sentiments, if Jane did not; and that, as for his not having spoken, that was very natural, besides being quite right and proper. He no doubt waited to know what Lord Moreton and herself thought about it (not a very complimentary suggestion to poor, ardent Jane Chester); and as she had ascertained Lord Moreton's sentiments on the subject, she should make an early opportunity of speaking an encouraging word to Mr. Falkener.

We are afraid that, if the truth were known, there was something in this expressed determination which did not altogether approve itself to Jane Chester's mind. It was no doubt

very ungrateful of her. But for a moment the thought arose that, on the whole, she should prefer having her love affairs to herself. Lady Moreton was very kind, no doubt, but it was hard, after all, to be in a position in which even your affections had to be patronised. To say the least of it, the romance was rather destroyed by this mode of handling the matter. It would have been far pleasanter to have had John Falkener whispering his love, some, just possible, moonlight night, when by some unusual, certainly, but not altogether preposterous chance, Jane should find herself in the act of crossing that drawbridge at the same moment as John Falkener. Did she not even, on rare occasions, meet him on his way to or from the Home? Why might he not be left to tell her himself that he loved her, instead of the fact being prosaically conveyed through the benevolent intermission of Lady Moreton?

But, on the whole, Jane thought it better and wiser to submit. It would not do to lose any chance. Perhaps, indeed, as Lady Moreton

so ruthlessly suggested, he *was* waiting to make sure of his patron's approbation. It was a comfort to know that he had it. And the moonlight, and the stolen speeches, and all the innocent mystery of poor Jane's romance, might come off just as well after everything was settled. And so she thanked Lady Moreton, feeling comforted by her perfect conviction that John cared for her, and consented that it should somehow, with Lady Moreton's infallible tact, be conveyed to him that he might give way to his pent-up emotions, declare his love, and claim his bride.

If her romance, and even her self-love, were a little mortified, she nevertheless was obliged to acknowledge that Lady Moreton's plan was sure and safe. And so with eyes lit up with gratitude, Jane resigned the carpet-work for that morning, and made her escape from the drawing-room up into her own little nest, and finally for a long ramble out into the fields, free and alone.

We will not follow her as she glided on with

rapid and elastic steps, sometimes smiling to herself, sometimes dashing away a sudden tear, sometimes pausing to gaze at and admire the lovely sparkling scene before her. The twinkling light on the smooth beech leaves, the streak of silver on the edge of each blade of green grass, the darkening shadows across her path, the spider's web trembling from leaf to spray along the hedge, and laden with diamond dew, the sudden pipe of the lusty robin, or the clear unbroken string of ecstatic melody from the towering lark over her head—all seemed to respond to the joy within her heart. The beautiful morn of early June was in unison with the romance of her first and only love; and her heart was too full of hope for it very much to matter whether John Falkener proposed to her himself, *viva voce*, or through the calmer accents of Lady Moreton's dignified communication.

That afternoon, Lady Moreton did a thing she had never been known to do since she first entered the doors of Moreton Moat. She walked alone to the Home, John Falkener's

cottage, and sending a little garden boy to run on before her, desired him to tell Mr. Falkener that she was coming to speak to him. Wondering greatly to himself, but without a shadow of the truth crossing his mind, John caught up the papers that lay scattered before him on his large writing-table, and brushing them into a drawer, rose quickly to meet Lady Moreton.

Her hand was on the latch of the small green gate at the end of the garden as he emerged from beneath the rustic porch, covered with honeysuckle and the white fluffy clusters of the sweet-scented clematis. He was quite at a loss as to what he was to attribute so unexpected an honour. But John Falkener was not a man whose pulse ran riot on small occasions; he felt perhaps a little distrustful, because that was generally the first feeling that awoke in his mind on most occasions; but he was neither alarmed nor flattered.

"Mr. Falkener," began her ladyship, with a bland smile, as she stopped beneath the hanging

branches of the climbing plants that hung in lavish disorder round the entrance, "I wanted to have a few words in private with you, and so I thought I would come and pay you a visit in your pretty little cottage. Really, I do not know a sweeter cottage than this anywhere in the neighbourhood. And I believe it has several good rooms in it, has it not? I am not aware that I have ever been upstairs."

"Is she going to turn me out, in favour of one of her *protégées*," thought John Falkener; but nothing of the thought betrayed itself in the few calm, grave words with which he answered his questioner. Lady Moreton was never at her ease with Mr. Falkner, and, that being the case, she always took refuge in a tone of even greater patronage than usual. And so, with a slight effort concealed beneath grand phrases, she laid before the silently listening man her long-entertained and profound conviction that he cherished a concealed passion for Jane Chester, her entire approbation of the same, and her lord's full consent and magnificent promises.

Falkener let her say her say without a word or a look of interruption. He sat leaning against his writing-table, having relinquished his large leather arm-chair to Lady Moreton, opposite to him; and with one hand he was making small notches in the pad of plotting-paper which lay before him, looking down on his work as if it were of considerable importance to execute those notches with great precision. Meanwhile his mind was flying over past, present, and future—a double train of thought—the one of caution, the other of hope; and all the while an anxiety that Lady Moreton should continue speaking long enough for him to prepare his answer.

It was quite true he had often consented to join the ladies in the evening; but Jane Chester had had nothing to do with that fact. His patron was the attraction, and next to his patron, Lady Moreton herself—not for any great regard he bore her, but because she was Lord Moreton's wife, a part of that whole in which he was wrapt up, and a part that must be con-

ciliated, and could not safely be overlooked. And now Jane Chester was thrust before him, and in one moment he would have to decide between risking the annoying Lady Moreton, and making up his mind to a wife not very young, not very lovely, and not especially attractive to himself.

The *pros* and the *cons* were dotting themselves down rapidly in his mind as Lady Moreton's measured sentences chimed upon his ear. The calculation had to be made at once, and he saw that the balance would be in his favour if he accepted the woman who was offered him. And yet he felt that, in doing so, one great chance was against him.

It was all important to John Falkener's dream of ambition that he should have a son, who might carry on his own schemes, and live to profit by them; and perhaps Jane, not being in her first youth, might never be a mother. It would be ruin to him not to have an heir to all his castles, and yet it must be risked. To gain time, as soon as Lady Moreton had finished

speaking, Falkener, in strong concise terms, having expressed his gratitude, which at that moment was quite sincere, offered, as the sole objection, that never having had much opportunity (so he expressed it) of paying Miss Chester the attentions she deserved, and by which he might possibly have hoped to gain her affections, he feared Lady Moreton might be mistaken in concluding that his offer, if made, would be accepted. He really had no sort of right to believe he had any place in Miss Chester's heart; but this Lady Moreton would not hear of. She had made her plan, and it must succeed. Jane was to live in that pretty house close to herself, always ready to come at her beck and call. She had worked up the idea till she could not bear to part with it; and so, what between selfishness and benevolence, she very nearly, if not quite, compromised the dignity of her humble friend by the solemn assurance she gave John Falkener that the citadel of Miss Chester's affections had surrendered without either assault or battery.

Most men are flattered by this idea; and John Falkener, whose life was spent in the corn-field or the stable, and whose thoughts were mainly on the repairing of an old barn, the shifting of a fence, or the unpunctuality of some farmer on rent-day, was not inaccessible to one of the first bits of female flattery that had fallen to his lot. And so it did not require any very great effort for him to picture to himself the Home newly decorated and furnished, Jane Chester changed into Jane Falkener, and Lady Moreton's patronage continued to his wife, and extended in a very beneficent way to that vision of a strong, manly, noble-looking boy, whose presence in the world of facts was so absolutely necessary to that far-off future which John Falkener was elaborating out of the tranquil present.

CHAPTER II.

SUCCESS.

LADY MORETON walked back to the Moat triumphant and pleased. She felt she had done the work of some benevolent fairy. She was the *Deus ex machina* of her small dominion, and had come forth at the right moment, and made happiness and sunshine all around her. She brought herself easily to believe that Falkener was really attached to Jane Chester; and considering her daily life at the Moat, and the grave shadows that fell on those lichen-covered walls, and the inky-black of the waters of that Moat, as evening stole over the silent old place, it is not to be wondered at that her kind heart should have been glad to evolve a little romance

out of her monotonous existence, and to cast a roseate hue upon the grey tints of reality. Could she have looked back upon the cottage she had left, could she have peeped again through that honeysuckle porch, how strange would have seemed to her the attitude and expression of the man she had quitted, and to whom she had been so gratuitously lending all the interest of an ardent lover.

With few but well-expressed thanks, Falkener had accompanied Lady Moreton to the garden-gate, and returned to his own house. He sank down in the arm-chair she had just left, and gave himself up to deep and anxious thought. Falkener was not a man to delude himself about his own motives and inclinations. He accepted himself for what he was, and had that sort of hard moral courage which enabled him to contemplate a possible wrong action, and not attempt to call it a right one, or to palliate it in his own mind. If he did wrong he did it consciously, and because he thought he saw reasons so potent that the moral question had

to give way to the necessity he created for himself. He knew he had long coveted Moreton Moat. He was quite conscious of the sentiment which prevented his ever seriously checking Lord Moreton's reckless conduct with regard to his property, and the means he resorted to for raising money. He measured his ambition against his affection for his patron, and though the latter was a reality, and a strong one, he always found that the ambition overtopped it. He knew that he was gradually sucking in the broad lands that lay before him. There was no overt dishonesty, no cooking of accounts, no falsehood in his balance-sheet. But nevertheless he had laid his hand on much; and if time, opportunity, and circumstance favoured him, he should lay his hand on more. But for the end, the distant end, when Lord Moreton advanced in years, and having through a long life enjoyed his beautiful possessions, should descend into the narrow chamber of his ancestors, when Falkener's dream might come true, two things were necessary: that Lord Moreton

should die childless—which seemed more than probable—and that he himself should have an heir.

And now he stood before the most important event of his life—matrimony. And in marrying a woman older than he was, not, in fact, much younger than Lady Moreton herself, was he not perhaps putting the first spoke in his own wheel of fortune, and risking the dying childless, like his patron, and so not becoming, himself and his heirs, the future possessors of those loved lands of Moreton Moat.

But still, as he argued to himself, he must risk something. And the marriage with Jane Chester presented undoubted advantages, because it was so certain to be attended by the unfailing patronage of Lord and Lady Moreton. And so he determined to see all the brightness possible in what was occurring; and having made his calculation, and proved it, on the whole, to his satisfaction, he let his thoughts wander on to the bride in store for him. He remembered how gentle she was. He felt the

grey eyes wandering timidly towards him, and then fixing themselves for a furtive moment on his own with that intensity which he had occasionally noticed with a slight surprise. He understood it now; and other things came to his memory—little stray incidents, that seemed slight at the time, but which gained importance now he had learnt he was to interpret them all into Jane's secret affection for himself. On the whole, it was pleasant to think of, and it came so easy—no trouble, no waste of time, no unnecessary anxiety. It had dropped into his hands like a ripe fruit, and so he would enjoy it, and be thankful.

All this was a widely different thing from the wild flutter that was going on within the loving heart of Jane Chester. Her fingers trembled as she wove a blue riband in her pale hair that evening, and ventured on a string of blue beads round her fair throat. She wavered long between a white dress or a soft grey, deciding at length with a bold resolve upon the former. The proposal had been made by deputy,

and accepted in the same manner. But now to Jane's mind the romance was to begin in good earnest.

Nor, her demands being modest and moderate, was she disappointed. John Falkener grew into a true lover, if not a very ardent one. He had not wasted his youth in false sentiment or evil company; and he was really and gratefully touched by the tender devotion of the true-hearted woman who promised to be his wife. Jane had her chance meetings in the moonlight on the old drawbridge. She even stole beneath the deep shadow of the elm trees, not alone. And while Lady Moreton sat, chaperoning at the open window, she walked to and fro with her hero, her arm linked in his, with her hand clasped upon it, and the pale ringlets getting rough and disordered as somehow they pressed too closely against her companion.

Those were halcyon days, the memory of which never died out. The incidents might be but few, but they were all the more teeming

with romance and poetry in Jane Chester's mind; and they led up, with a sweet unbroken harmony, to the important day when, blushing and happy, she pledged her faith to him at the altar, and felt as strongly, and perhaps more deeply than many a young maiden of eighteen.

For what have a few years more or less to do with the love of a woman's heart, when for the first time the mighty feeling dawns upon her, and all her past life seems to fall back into dim shadow until that light arose, and all the future looks like an endless ever-growing glory, because that sun has risen?

A year had barely passed away, and anyone well-used to the ways of the old house, and to the habits of the household, would have begun to feel that a strange and happy change was gradually working. The Home had been refurnished, and made pretty and homelike by the benevolent hands of Lady Moreton; and the bride, under the influence of new liberty and new joys, had shaken off the subdued and faded

appearance of her ladyship's companion, and blossomed into a far brighter and more interesting woman. The pale locks had a warm golden tinge in them that their earlier youth had never known; and that clear complexion, with the delicate pink blush, was a charm Lord Moreton had never perceived when Jane sat day after day so silent and sedate through the long dreary dinner hour.

The fact was Jane was at last transplanted into a soil that suited her. She had duties of her own, a house of her own, and a sense of independence which came like sunshine after rain on her hitherto chilled heart. She seemed to grow younger with each month of her married life; and it caused but little surprise when it came to be known that Mrs. John Falkener, who had been looked upon quite as an old maid, was about to become a mother. Mr. Falkener was as pleased and proud as an expectant father is bound to be. Indeed his happiness and prospects would have suffered severely had his wife borne him no children.

We must do him the justice to say that his joy was of a very true and genuine kind. He made a good husband, and he promised fair to make a good father. The sluices of his heart, so long shut up, like poor Jane's also, only in a far less innocent and simple way, by dependence and solitariness, now opened to all natural affections very honestly. Not that his dreams of ambition were really laid aside; but that, almost unconsciously to himself, he was yielding to more wholesome influences, and in his bride's society, and in the thought of his baby, he seemed for a short space to rest content, and crave nothing further.

But if the prospect of Jane's becoming a mother produced a little agreeable surprise amongst the gossips of the neighbourhood, it was nothing to the overwhelming astonishment with which it soon after became known that Lady Moreton herself was looking for the same crown of womanhood, a few months after Jane gave birth to a son. The same light of a new-found youth seemed to have fallen at the same

time on Moreton Moat in its melancholy grandeur, and on the smiling cottage Home.

It was a touching sight to see Lord Moreton, from a somewhat rough and unobservant husband, converted into an anxious and assiduous attendant upon every wish and whim of his wife. Probably much of his former apparent coldness arose from the ever-gnawing disappointment he had endured at having no family. He never alluded to it, except sometimes to John Falkener, when any question arose of trying to raise money at the expense of the estate. Then he would suddenly burst forth in passionate tones, and ask why he should not do as he liked, and get what he could out of his property, seeing that he was childless, and had been married fourteen years without a hope of being otherwise. John Falkener knew what a "worm in the bud" it was to his patron; and as, for a few minutes, Lord Moreton used to storm forth his vehement feelings in no measured terms, the calm and wily agent would hope his subdued countenance and gentle words might pass for

sympathy. For in his heart Falkener could not wish for an heir to the Moreton estates, nor indeed for any event which might check Lord Moreton's reckless expedients for "raising the wind."

Late one day in the month of April, a messenger came to John Falkener from the great house, to beg he would look in on Lord Moreton after dinner. Jane was at that time nursing her baby Charles of two months old, and she knew the happy secret that Lady Moreton had been pondering over for a long time past, and which she had first confessed to her humble friend, one evening after holding such commune with her as women will do when they are secretly wearing their crown as expectant mothers. But Jane was as true and as close a friend with regard to all Lady Moreton's concerns after her marriage as she had been before. Falkener was often surprised, and sometimes provoked, to find how hopeless it was to worm anything out of his wife respecting the family in which she had lived so long, and the interior concerns of which were neces-

sarily in some respects better known to her than even to himself. So that if she guessed why Lord Moreton had sent for her husband that evening, an event which had grown rare now he had a fireside of his own from which his patron did not like to summon him, she at least said nothing, and cheerfully let him go.

John Falkener found Lord Moreton in high spirits, and at the beginning of their interview evidently holding back some very good thing he had to communicate. At last the delicious secret was expressed, and with a voice choking with emotion, and glad eyes glistening with tears, Lord Moreton announced to the companion of his boyhood and manhood his hope of becoming a father.

If Falkener turned a little pale, the man was far too moved himself to notice it. He talked on in his broad hearty way, the words rolling out in his deep manly voice, and the rather loud laughter pealing forth from time to time, as he spoke joyously of the future, and registered, for John's special hearing, a thousand good

and wise resolutions, for recovering his lost lands, and paying off his many mortgages.

They talked on till late into the night, and Jane sat solitary at home, wondering. At last she heard his step on the gravel. Long ago the one maid-servant had been sent to bed, and she flew to open the door to her husband. As he stepped into the sitting-room, and the full light of the lamp fell on his face, it looked pale and haggard. He turned to her short round as he put his hat on the table, and said gravely, almost sternly,

"You never told me, Jane, about Lady Moreton."

"Oh! John, is anything the matter? Is all not going well with dear Lady Moreton?" she exclaimed, as she sprang forward, frightened at his strange gravity.

"Why, what should be going wrong? Don't put yourself in a fuss. I mean you kept the secret of a coming heir from me, and it appears you knew it all along."

"It was not for me to be the first to tell you,

dear John. Lady Moreton was anxious it should not too soon be talked about. I have been longing to tell you; but of course it was right you should hear it first from my lord. I suppose he is very glad. Tell me all about it."

She rattled on for some time, full of her honest and affectionate delight, till the slowness and coldness of the responses she obtained gradually checked the flow of her ready congratulations. She wondered John did not seem more pleased, but concluded, as it was so late, that he was tired; and from that day little more was said between them on the subject, Jane remarking to herself that John naturally did not care to talk about babies, but that of course he was very glad in his own quiet way.

The Salic law was not in vogue in the Moreton family, and therefore it would make no practical difference if the child proved to be a girl. But even that minor disappointment did not come to check the full tide of Lord Moreton's joy.

The brown and golden leaves were falling

fast one fitful October evening, the birds were rehearsing a few fragments of last Spring's ditties, as if to dispel the dread of coming Winter, masses of white cloud were rolling rapidly across a cold blue sky, and the earth sent up a fragrant and nutty odour. Lord Moreton's manly figure was seen approaching the house, in his brown velveteen shooting-jacket, and his strong, well-formed limbs cased in knickerbockers. Two tired dogs followed at his heels, and the old keeper was bent with the weight of a bag full of pheasants and partridges. As they approached the house, a servant met them with the brief but thrilling announcement that the doctor was sent for, and that my lady wished to see his lordship immediately.

Through the long hours of the night, and on and on till the same time the succeeding day, the whole house was astir with anxiety, and it hung on a thread whether mother or child would live, or both would perish. At length the poor little heir's weary struggle into weary

life was accomplished. He hailed the setting sun with a weak, faint wail, and the mother lay on her pillows whiter than they, but with a face irradiated with happiness, for joy that a man-child was born into the world.

The whole country rang with congratulations, for Lord Moreton was exceedingly popular, and Lady Moreton was universally respected even where she was not beloved. Bonfires illuminated the hills, and the postman's hands were dripping over with congratulatory letters. The baby grew and strengthened, but the mother never entirely rallied. Before the Spring had brought back to the little birds the full memory of their early love-songs, Lady Moreton's eyes were closed in death. She sank to rest as one who felt she had fulfilled her mission; and almost her last words to her husband were,

"You will love my memory, dear Moreton, for at least I have given you a son."

It is strange how great a blank one quiet hum-drum woman may leave in the circle of

which she was the centre. The homely nourishment of daily bread is of more importance to us than our occasional feasts of venison and turtle. Lord Moreton crept about an aged and an altered man. Silence and stagnation seemed to have fallen on the house; and there was no sound or sight of cheerfulness, save the crowing and kicking of the merry urchin in the nursery, who seemed resolved on taking life at its best, and whose ruddy cheeks grew rounder and more dimpled with smiles through the sad year of mourning for his mother.

It was not long before Lord Moreton found the dreariness of his house, and his own utter inexperience of children, joined to his intense anxiety about little Edward, more than he could bear. So, one evening, John Falkener was summoned again to see Lord Moreton, and the proposal made to him that he and his wife and child should have a set of rooms to themselves at the Moat, and the two babies be brought up together by Mrs. Falkener. They were to be quite independent; but he would

feel he had some one near him. His terrors about Edward would cease, for Mrs. Falkener would see that he had all a child could require.

"I do not know what you mean your boy to become, John; but if he is to step into your shoes, and manage this estate, which by that time will, with all the retrenchments I am going to make, be double its present value, there can be no harm in the two boys growing up together, much as you and I did. You have not been less of a faithful agent to me because we romped together as children."

A cold glitter passed into John Falkener's eyes as he sat listening. Was this to be the end of his long silent dreams of ambition—to live in that house as a dependent, and only to see his son growing up to occupy the same place he had filled himself? It was too bitter, and yet it was most probable. Meanwhile, the safest and the most prudent course was to make the best of it. It would never do to let his influence grow less; it might be wiser to do what would certainly keep it up, and might

increase it. And so the bargain was concluded, and before another week was out, John Falkener had taken up his abode in that house which he was never long to quit again till he was carried to his grave.

When the first solemnizing effects of a great sorrow had passed away from Lord Moreton's mind, it soon became evident that he was not a man at his time of life to radically change his habits, and alter his character from careless expenditure to careful saving. Whenever he wanted money for any of his numerous whims, money must be had, no matter how. Another farm was mortgaged, or an outstanding field was sold; and somehow or other John Falkener was always able to accommodate his patron.

The years sped swiftly by, bringing no important change beyond the trace of their own waxing and waning to the inhabitants of Moreton Moat. The house grew duller and greyer as the old lord sank more into a uniform monotony of existence. He became more dependent

than ever on John Falkener, and trusted him as a second self. Nor did John ever burden his conscience with any really overt act of unfaithfulness to his friend. He merely let things take their course, and did nothing to stem the current. When the evil hour came round that some new drain was to be made on the estate, he lent his aid, not in restraining the folly of his master, but in enabling him to gratify his wishes. He bided his time, and time served his purpose.

The grey lichens thickened and deepened on the walls without, and the grey shadows of life fell on the three quiet dwellers within. There was no stirring life or youth about the place, save in the two lads, so nearly of an age and growing together side by side.

Edward Moreton was a wild, wayward boy, always getting into scrapes, showing a tendency to more than his father's carelessness about money, without anything like his father's sterling qualities. Later years developed the seeds of a hectic tendency, and that increased

the excitability of his character. He was sent early to Eton, while Charles Falkener went to the Charter House; and thenceforth the boy friends met only during the vacations.

We shall hear of Charles again, but we have little more to say of the old stock of the Moretons.

Edward was a lad of eighteen, and still at Eton, when he was summoned to attend his father's death-bed. Lord Moreton had had a stroke three months previously, from which he had never entirely recovered; and those about him felt that probably the end was approaching.

Jane Falkener waited on him with the faithfulness of a sister and the deference of a dependent. She never forgot the past, nor how it was that she came to be living so intimately in the house which, in her eyes, was so grand and noble. Faithfulness, true, sincere, and self-sacrificing, was her one characteristic; and yet, with the short-sightedness of a woman's affection, she failed to discover that her husband was wanting in exactly that quality.

A cold night of fast-falling snow brought the young heir to the house where his father lay dying. The wheels of the carriage made a scarcely perceptible sound as they neared the door, and the horses' tread fell dull and muffled on the ground, so that his approach was not noticed till he drew the curtain of his father's bed, and stood aghast and startled before the dying man. A whispered recognition, and a whispered blessing, and the awful shadow swept across the old man's face—that shadow which is cast by the Angel of Death as he bends over the stiffening form to clasp the emancipated soul.

All was over.

And then followed the pomp of death—the pomp with which rank and wealth cover up the grim reality and make it grimmer still. Do what we will, it is still "dust to dust," and the worm and corruption.

The crimson velvet coffin, with its coronet, was lowered into the family vault; the silver plate told of the titles and honours of Hugh,

Baron Moreton; and the iron door of the cold stone chamber we have already alluded to in our first pages, closed on all the dreary grandeur. And none but the Great Judge, and the good and bad angels, knew the rest.

When the will was opened, it was found that Lord Moreton desired Mr. and Mrs. Falkener might continue to live in the house until his son was of age. John Falkener was named one of the guardians, and the other was a far-off and aged cousin of the family, who was sure never to interfere, and who was probably named chiefly to keep up appearances. The fact was, the Moretons were fast dying out, root and branch, and for the two last generations they had extended their family connections very little by the marriages they had contracted. The course of events soon, therefore, swept over the past, and left scarcely a perceptible ripple. After a due time given to mourning, and another due time to congratulations, the young heir returned to Eton, and from thence

went to Cambridge, according to a desire expressed in writing by his father. But, as he approached his majority, Mr. Falkener seemed to feel that it was no longer advisable to keep the two young men so much together. He had himself purchased a property in Jamaica, and left it in the care of a cousin of his own; and thither Charles Falkener was sent, at the age of seventeen, to assist his cousin in the cultivation of the coffee plantations.

The rejoicings when the young Lord Moreton came of age were great and vociferous. He left for a tour on the Continent immediately after; and meanwhile Mr. and Mrs. Falkener quietly retired to the Home Cottage, and the great house was shut up till Lord Moreton should return. But his reign, when he did return, was a brief one. Habits of intoxication hastened the natural tendency to disease in his constitution; a severe cold caught out hunting threw him into a rapid decline; and his father had not lain more than five years in the faded glories of his crimson velvet coffin, before the

iron door was unlocked again, to admit a younger inmate, and the last of the Moretons.

We will not weary our readers with a minute account of all that followed on the closing of this long line of noble barons. The estate was found to be deeply mortgaged and heavily involved. The only person who had a claim on it was the distant cousin and former guardian of the last lord. No will was found; the property was to be sold. The debts on the estate were almost all due to John Falkener, the agent; which the remainder his savings of many years more than sufficed to buy up. In short, after a certain season of doubt and indecision, when people wondered and conjectured a great deal about it, the end was that John Falkener and his wife were found again installed in the great house, not as dependents, but as possessors; and the murmuring and regretting, and the smothered dislike, and almost hatred of the old tenants, who had claimed for so many generations as their landlord a lord indeed, all went for nothing. Money is next to omnipotent, and

money did it. And now the only thing we can see in the lofty rooms, and wide passages, and grand staircases of the noble old house, that is still noble and has a moral beauty about it, is the true, faithful, and simple nature of its new mistress. The yellow hair, that had grown so bright when her one romance was realized, had long ago turned grey; and not three years after she sat at the head of the table where she had before been a shy and retiring dependent, she laid aside her brief honours quietly and sweetly, as she might have done a heavy, tiresome garment, and closed her eyes in death, amidst the tears and blessings of all the poor of the neighbourhood.

And so died out the last fair, pure remembrance of the old past. What remained was sordid, the result of money, and not in any sense of nobility. John Falkener lived on alone at the Moat, and we must follow his son to the rich coffee plantations and arid skies of Jamaica.

CHAPTER III.

TROPICAL SKIES AND TROPICAL HEARTS.

"OH! Nursie, I am so tired of this. Shut out the light. Try and make the room dark, and let me go to sleep and forget myself."

"Of what is my Nini so tired? What ails my beautiful darling to-day?" replied a middle-aged woman, in the dress of a respectable Jamaica upper servant, round whose brow was twisted a yellow handkerchief that nearly concealed her abundant hair, in the masses of which shone many a silver streak.

She was standing with her arms round the slender waist of a beautiful girl of nineteen, whose head leant upon the woman's shoulder, while her white arms were thrown about her neck.

It was a strange contrast of blooming youth and declining life, and of proud, noble beauty in the one, with the more common features and half Indian cast of countenance of the other. The girl whom the old woman so familiarly called by the childish name of Nini, was dressed in a loose muslin wrapper, with bright blue ribbons inserted in the embroidery, and a broad blue sash gathering the folds round her lithe and supple waist. Her rich black hair had partially escaped from a ribbon of the same colour, and hung in long wavy tresses below her waist. The dress was open in front; her languid attitude, as she leant forward on her old nurse, had caused it to slip aside from one white shoulder, and betrayed a contour rounder and fuller than seemed to accord with that marvellously slim waist, or than the northern skies of our land develop in our maidens of nineteen. She raised her head for a moment as she answered the nurse's question, and showed a face of wonderful beauty. Large dark eyes and darkly-pencilled eyebrows; a slightly aquiline and

delicately-formed nose, with almost transparent nostrils; a dead white skin, without a freckle or stain, and full lips of the richest red. Her cheeks were quite colourless. All colour was concentrated in the eyes and mouth, and there it was intense and vivid. The lips were moist in their rich ripeness, and the eyes had a velvet depth of softness that could suddenly change into a glittering brightness dangerous to behold. At the moment she looked up in the old woman's face it was the flashing glitter that was there.

She threw back her head, the long hair fell away from her marble brow, the red lips parting in a harsh smile showed the rows of faultless teeth, small and white as an infant's; but the wild girl had set them firm, and ground them together, as in a hissing voice she replied,

"I am tired of my life, of myself, and of you, Nursie—no, not of *you*," she ended, with a sudden burst of affection, clinging close to the old woman, and nearly strangling her in her tight embrace. She hid her face again on her shoulder, and burst into tears.

For a moment the nurse made no reply, beyond the soothing, inarticulate sounds with which she might have tried to pacify her young charge when a mere baby. She stroked the long hair, and kissed her forehead, and then said, as the sobbing subsided,

"There, there, my darling, you must not fret. Tell me what it all means; though I think your old nurse can pretty well guess."

The girl disengaged herself from the woman's arms, looked up in her face for a moment, and then, with the tears still on her cheeks, burst out in a ringing laugh—

"You may say it if you like, Nancy. I know you think me a fool; and I don't much care whether you do or not. But it's quite true what I tell you—I am tired of everything, always excepted my good old Nancy. And now, look here, Nancy, do as I tell you," said the young lady, suddenly flinging herself on the sofa, upon a pile of soft cushions, and throwing her arms above her head, with the long tresses of black hair crossing them—"go

out and try and hear some news—pick up some gossip, Nancy, dear—find out something to amuse me, that's a good old Nursie."

The old woman looked down on her with a half-sorrowful expression, and shook her head.

"I won't have you look like that!" exclaimed the wild beauty, starting up, while a faint blush rose on her pale cheeks—"you shall not say what you have got on your lips to say, you wicked woman; though I don't care if you do say it. And now, go along, Nursie, dear; draw the blinds down, as I told you. Come back in an hour or so; and now leave me to sleep."

And so saying, she curled herself up, turned away her face, and closed her eyes, only once peeping round as Nancy still lingered near her, shaking her head with a sad but indulgent smile. As she turned to leave the room, the girl for one moment looked up and said,

"Oh! by-the-by, Nursie, if my father comes home and asks for me, tell him I have a headache; and, for Heaven's sake, don't let him come near me!"

The nurse murmured a few words of assent, and slowly left the room.

The hot sun of a Jamaica sky poured its keen rays on the closed blinds of the verandah, and wherever there was chink or cranny, peeped in at the window, and dappled the matting with which the floor was covered with dancing flakes of light. The room was full of the perfumed breath of a large stephanotis, that clambered over the trellis-work and the supports of the verandah, and hung its branches of waxen flowers in luxuriant abundance amid the dark green leaves of its long tendrils. No sound broke the hot silence, except the dead tap, tap of the hoe on the hard sods of the well-baked earth in the neighbouring sugar plantations, as strings of black peasants, in the smallest amount of clothing, continued their monotonous labour. From time to time they joined in a sing-song chaunt, not without a pathetic melody. But the intense heat disposed them more at this time of the day to work in silence.

Adelaide Snowden had fallen asleep; the

dancing light fell from time to time on her thick tresses, and daintily kissed a fold of her white garment, flickered a moment across her pale brow, or darted with a daring rapidity within the open folds of muslin that betrayed the regular pulsation of her bosom. Her father, of whom she was the only child, was a man of low extraction and lower habits. In early life he had been an attorney in a small town in the west of England. Whether by fair practice or by crooked ways was never distinctly proved, but certain it is that Joe Snowden became the possessor of a very considerable sum of money about the same time that an honest man who was known to have left all his affairs in his hands was declared bankrupt. It might be only a coincidence; but popular prejudice was of opinion it was something more. Not long afterwards, and probably in consequence of popular prejudice—always a very awkward adversary to confront—Joe Snowden disappeared from the town of Chatester, and turned up as a wealthy and successful planter in Jamaica.

He married a very beautiful Portuguese girl, of violent temper and indifferent morals. Adelaide inherited her mother's beauty of face, while her figure showed the fuller development of a richer organisation and a more powerful temperament. Her mother died when Adelaide was only three years old, and the child was left almost exclusively to the very questionable care of Nancy, who had lived with her mother for many years, and in whose veins there ran a very unmistakeable taint of Indian blood, while her character had that mixture of servile devotion and absence of principle so generally found amongst her class and people. She adored her Nini, which was the name the child had given herself before she was able to pronounce the more intricate sound of Adelaide; and by that name she was still frequently addressed by her old nurse, to whom the familiarities of long service were freely permitted.

Adelaide's education had been of a very desultory kind. Of real study she knew nothing. The books she read were chiefly of an idle sort;

and all she did was done in an idle way, well calculated to deceive those who only saw her casually, and followed with admiration the languid undulations of her slow movements, the proud grace of her picturesqne attitudes, and listened to the tones of her full melodious voice.

There was one thing Adelaide could do, and do well. She could sing in rich contralto tones, that took you by surprise, and made you thrill in every nerve. She seldom accompanied herself, though she was glad to have it done for her. But when that was wanting, raising herself a little from her recumbent pose against the crimson silk cushions of her favourite sofa, and crossing her white, powerful, but beautifully modelled hands lightly on her knees, with drooping eyelids, beneath which burnt the smouldering fire of those glorious eyes, she would pour forth in easy cadence without an effort, without even an accelerated breath, a torrent of rich, low, full notes that hushed all other sounds, and generally left her auditors too deeply moved even for flattery.

The passion and intensity of a tropical clime, with the vigour and power of a northern temperament, seemed to have met in one, and fused themselves in the utterance of her wonderful voice, as it calmly and easily welled forth from the full white throat that sat so column-like and majestic on her somewhat ample shoulders.

Languid as she appeared in all her movements, she was capable of great physical exertion whenever there was a cause; and even very often when no cause could be found but the wayward fancies of her fickle will. She was a bold horsewoman; she had trained many a horse to her own riding, and fearlessly mounted more than one which her father's grooms hesitated to cross. That light firm hand, that easy steady seat, influenced the noble animal she rode, whose quick instincts submitted to her dominion when he spurned the coarser strength of a more ignoble nature.

There was one servant specially deputed to follow her in her long excursions. His master

placed much trust and confidence in Long Jack, as he was familiarly termed, and he did not like his daughter to go out with any other of the negroes engaged in the stables.

Whether it was this very confidence of her father in the man which irritated Adelaide, or whether it arose from caprice, it would be difficult to say, but she as cordially disliked Jack as her indolent nature allowed her to do, under circumstances where there existed nothing tangible to call forth her aversion. Jack probably had an intuitive knowledge that he was no favourite with his young mistress, and the fact made him more subservient in his manner, and more plausible in his speech; though Adelaide more than once fancied she heard low interludes of less respectful ejaculations, occasionally, amidst his obsequious words.

When younger, her great delight had been to start off her horse at full gallop just as she turned some sharp angle in the road, and leave poor Jack out of sight, long before he could make up for the respectful distance at which, as

her groom, he was accustomed to follow her.

Then, if she could only elude him completely, and come home by some other route, and so ride alone straight into the yard, to the dismay of the other servants, and the rage and fury of her father, whose wrath was sure to overtake the unhappy Jack, she was thoroughly contented.

She took no sort of notice of the storm her malice gave rise to—she deigned no further explanation than the simple statement that John had not followed her; but Miss Nini had gained her end, and was pleased with herself for the rest of the day.

Her father was proud of her, and in his own coarse way worshipped her. He had no idea of correcting her faults or moulding her character. How could he, when his own was corrupted by so many vices, and when, above all, he so constantly degraded himself in her eyes by his habits of intoxication. Again and again had that proud girl to stand by and witness scenes of low drunkenness in her own father, that

filled her at first with horror, and ended in a settled repugnance. And yet it seemed as if the more haughtily she behaved to him the more inclined he was to fall down and worship her, while at the same time his commands were frequently imperious, and his prohibitions capricious and vexatious. Such was the home, and such the education, of Adelaide Snowden; nor is it extraordinary that, at the age at which we present her to our readers, these fatal seeds should have borne fatal flowers, soon to ripen into more poisonous fruit. A home without any religion, and scarcely any mere moral principle, with no more intrinsic refinement than her own glorious beauty inevitably shed over it, surrounded by enervating luxury, and debarred from intellectual society or pursuits, what could the poor girl become but the incarnation of uncurbed passions and culpable indolence, joined to an almost unlimited power of following her own whims and gratifying her foolish desires.

Adelaide had dozed away nearly two hours of the hot noontide when she was roused by

the sound of her father's voice as he entered the house. He had been absent for a day and a night, to visit a distant plantation; and now, with his usual recklessness, had ridden home in the heat of the day, and, as a consequence, had partaken somewhat largely of refreshing beverages on the road, and therefore was exactly in that state of semi-intoxication in which Adelaide least liked to find him. He was then always noisy and exasperatingly affectionate or ridiculously imperious.

She sat upright to catch the sounds, and hoped he was not approaching her door. She heard Nancy's voice pleading with him not to go in; and she heard the loud oath that came as a rejoinder; and then the words, "I tell you I will see her. I don't care whether she is asleep or not. I have news she must and shall hear. Halloa, Adelaide, where are you, my beauty? D—— it, I can't see in this infernal dark hole!" as he stumbled and staggered up to the sofa on which she sat crouching, and threw himself down on the further end, his

legs stretched out before him, his arms hanging listless, and his broad-brimmed sun-hat still shading his eyes.

"What do you want, father? Why do you come and disturb me now? It is so foolish of you to go out in the heat, and then come home with a sunstroke, as you will do some of these days."

"Sunstroke, nonsense! I am come to tell you, Beauty, that next Wednesday the Johnstones have a party, and my Beauty is to ride over early in the morning and rest all day, that she may dance all night. And, Adelaide—do you hear, child?—my own opinion is that the party is given expressly for my girl. You know why, Beauty, so don't turn away your head and pretend to be sulky. Mind, I will have you put on all your best toggery; and you are to open the ball with young Johnstone; that is what old Mother Johnstone told me herself. And I suppose you know what that means, eh, Beauty?"

He looked at her from under his heavy brows

with a half-drunken leer; and she started up from her recumbent position as if she had been shot, and drew herself up to her full height before him.

"I don't know what it means, and I don't intend to know. I hope you have not promised that I shall go, for I shall do no such thing. I told you before, father, that I did not want to have anything to say to the Johnstones; and I mean it."

"Stuff and nonsense, girl! I told them you were coming. Of course I did—what is to prevent you? You are fond enough of balls in general; what the deuce is to prevent your going to this one?"

"Just *this* is to prevent it, that you have said it is given for *me;* and that—that young Johnstone has dared to think he can command me for the first dance; that is quite reason enough why I should not set my foot within their doors."

"I only told you what Mother Johnstone said. I suppose the young gentleman hopes it

himself; but he had not the audacity to tell me so, though I daresay he guesses I shall have no objection to that, and to something more."

The colour rose to Adelaide's cheeks, as she turned haughtily on him and said,

"Why do you aggravate me, father? Every word you say makes the matter worse. I won't go to the ball, and I won't dance with young Johnstone; and what's more, father, I *won't* marry him!"

She stamped her foot as she spoke, and turning on her heel, walked straight out of the room.

Her father followed her with his eyes without moving from his position, and muttered between his teeth—

"Hoighty, toighty, what does all this mean? The young filly has taken the bit in her teeth, and there is no holding her in. I wonder what her objections are to young Johnstone? Be they what they may, she must give them up. She *shall* have him, and I have as good as given my word for it. I must get at the bottom of

this. Is there anything else in the wind, I wonder? Nancy will know. I shall question her; and Long Jack must tell me, too, which way the young lady takes her airings. And yet, when I come to think of it, she cannot have much choice. Our only neighbours are Charles Falkener, a married man, and young Oliver Standing, as poor as a church-mouse, and as stupid as an owl. I suppose it is only the way all young girls think it is right to go on whenever matrimony is proposed to them, unless it be with some one of their own finding. But Adelaide shall marry whom I please. I am not going to give away my girl and my fortune to some handsome adventurer she may chance to fall in love with. Johnstone's fortune is equal to mine; and, besides, I like the fellow. And my word is given, and there's an end of it."

That evening, Mr. Snowden sat, after dinner, smoking a cigar, and sipping brandy-and-water, while he studied the papers attentively, and seemed disinclined for conversation. Adelaide

was no less so. She had strolled out under the verandah, and was sitting at some distance from the open window of the dining-room, in a low basket chair.

The house, which was of only one story, was built on an eminence that sloped down on three sides to a deep gorge, at the foot of which was a small rivulet. It was, in fact, on the edge of a large space of table-land; and to the left of where Adelaide was sitting stretched wide plains of coffee plantations; while the slope of the ground in front was cut into garden terraces, and to the right was clothed with verdure, and dotted here and there with flowering shrubs. The middle distance was partly wood and partly rocks, through which wound the high road—a glaring white stream in the hot sun, and a line of silver in the moonlight. A group of palm-trees broke the harsh outline of the road; close to the house spread the dark green branches of a magnificent cedar; and next to that stood a row of fine acacia-trees, in whose pink and white blossoms the

humming-birds disported their brilliant jewelled wings.

Adelaide had not sat there long, ruminating her own bitter thoughts, and tearing petal from petal of a branch of the stephanotas that grew around her, when Nancy, with stealthy tread, came round the corner, and finding her young mistress alone, squatted on the ground beside her.

"What ails my Nini to-night, my beautiful Nini, with such pale cheeks, and eyes that have been washed in tears?"

"It is just what I told you before, Nancy—I am tired of everything; and now my father is teasing me about this ball at the Johnstones, and I will not go. I told you, Nancy, to try and pick up some news—something to amuse me—it is so dull here. I wish something would happen. Nancy, dear, don't you think it would be great fun if the house were to take fire, and we all had to scramble out in the night; and you and I would be very heroic, and save half a dozen people's lives. I do wish it would

happen! I wonder who would come to our assistance? I suppose Mr. Charles Falkener would see the flames from his house, for I can just see the top of his little white tower peeping through the trees; and then, as he is our nearest neighbour, probably he would come over and help."

"Yes; and catch my Nini in his arms as she flung herself out of the window. That is what would happen, I suppose?"

"Well, you know it might, Nancy." And Adelaide blushed, and did not look up. Nancy's keen black eyes were fixed on her.

"They say Mrs. Falkener is not well," resumed the nurse, in an indifferent tone.

"What is the matter with her?"

"Oh! she was always very delicate—a poor little white, feeble thing. I suppose, Miss Adelaide, you know she is expecting a piccaninny; and there are some that say she will never get through it."

Adelaide turned pale, and her head sank lower. She gave a deep sigh, but did not

speak. Presently she glanced up in her nurse's face, with a strange, wild, and questioning look. She had not known that Charles Falkener was expecting his first-born. She had not known that his wife was in bad health. Then, bending her forehead down on Nancy's shoulder, she said,

"Oh! Nancy, what is that to me?"

What indeed!

Adelaide spent a restless and feverish night. She thought a great deal about Mrs. Falkener's illness; wondered whether Charles Falkener was glad to have a child; wondered whether he was very anxious about his wife; wondered how it was she had never cultivated Mrs. Falkener's acquaintance more; and finally, wondered at her own wonderment. She had never seen anyone the least like Charles Falkener. In manners and appearance he was certainly the first gentleman in the island. The tall, supple figure, the look of agility and strength in the long limbs and broad chest; and then that head of an Apollo, with the warm, nut-brown hair,

the eyes a shade darker, while over the brow there seemed a glow of golden light that harmonized with the whole of that radiant colouring. She did not know if he was clever. There seemed no reason to think about that. His manners were perfect; so quiet, and yet with a something of intensity which gave a marvellous charm to every action.

She had only lately seen much of him, for, till a few months back, he had been living in a distant part of Jamaica. Now he had come to settle on a small property which had belonged to his cousin, from whom he inherited it, and on which there was a very good house.

There was some mystery attached to Mr. Falkener's marriage; and it was partly that, and partly that Mrs. Falkener did not seem a particularly interesting person, which had prevented Adelaide from calling more frequently. But latterly she had begun to feel an interest in the place. In short, there was some secret spring at work, which led to her thoughts wandering more often than usual to that small

white tower of Newton House that peeped above the trees. She had never seen Mr. Falkener with his wife at the several parties at which she had been in the habit of meeting him. Her bad health was always given as the reason for her non-appearance. But gossips said Mr. Falkener's marriage had been a great *mésalliance;* and it was confidently asserted that it was kept a profound secret from his family. Adelaide was determined to sift this mystery to the bottom, and with that determination she set off the first free day to call on Mrs. Falkener.

Meanwhile her determined opposition to her father's wish that she should appear at the ball continued and gained strength, and they had one or two disagreeable scenes about it. The ball was to take place on Wednesday, and it was Monday before Adelaide found an opportunity of driving to Newton House.

On her arrival she was shown into a long room containing very little furniture, at the end of which, on a cane sofa, wrapped in not the very whitest of white morning gowns, sat

Mrs. Falkener. She was a little woman, with a skin that had probably been very fair, but was now jaundiced from bad health. She had indistinct grey eyes, and a quantity of very fair hair. Her features were irregular, but it was quite possible to fancy that when she had been in good health she had had a pretty face, a bright complexion, and a slight, graceful figure. It was all gone now, and in its place you saw a bundle of ill-fitting, tumbled, and whity-brown muslin, surmounted by a yellow-white face, from which all expression, save one of rather peevish suffering, had departed. She feebly got off her sofa to meet Adelaide as she entered, and motioned her to sit by her. Until this little woman began to speak it would never strike anyone that she could inspire any possible interest. But the moment she entered into conversation you were taken by surprise. The voice had a ring in it which forced you to listen. The grey eyes grew dark, and looked at you with a sidelong, furtive glance that fixed your attention, though not, perhaps, in the

pleasantest way. She ran on to Adelaide about her health, and about her untidy room, like a school-girl of seventeen. She brought in Charles's name at every moment, and always a little as if Charles did not like this, and might not like that. She seemed fond of him, but afraid of him. In the midst of one of her rambling sentences she raised her eyes to the window, and there was Charles coming up the path.

"Lor', if there isn't Mr. Falkener coming home! He will be so glad to see you, Miss Adelaide. It is not many people that come to call here—indeed, Charles says he is surprised at the inhospitality and incivility of the neighbours; though I don't see that he has any right to complain, for I am sure *he* is asked out often enough. Oh! Charles, here is Miss Snowden! Is it not kind of her to have come so far to see me?"

"Not very far, either," said Adelaide, as she rose and held out her hand to Mr. Falkener. "I should have come before to see Mrs. Falkener, had I known she was suffering."

"I am sure it is very good of you. Annie has to be a great deal alone, for I am constantly absent from home. Has your father returned, Miss Snowden?"

"Yes; he came back three days ago, and is full of a ball at the Johnstones, to which he wants me to go."

"There, now!" exclaimed Annie, clapping her hands, "did I not tell you, Charles, everybody would be there? He wants not to go, Miss Snowden, and I tell him it is a shame he should have to stop at home with a sick wife. Of course you are going, and I have told him again and again I had much rather he were amused than sitting at home every evening, and alone generally, as I have to go to bed so early."

Adelaide looked round with interest at the poor little woman, with her eager, unselfish protestations; and then her eyes were turned to Charles Falkener, to see how he took it. But his head was bent down; he seemed weary and bored, and as if he hardly heard. When

he looked up, Adelaide was still looking at him; their eyes met, and his countenance changed. Annie saw it—at least she saw, or half divined something, and so ran on—

"I am sure he will go, if you will, Miss Snowden; he would go anywhere to meet you. I have always known that. And you had better go to this ball, Charles. I shall take it quite as a favour if Miss Snowden will make you."

It was all very tactless, and rather awkward, and Adelaide rose to take leave. Mr. Falkener went forward to open the door, and Annie, while holding Adelaide's hand, said, in a half whisper,

"It would do him good to go and be a little amused. You don't know how bored he gets at home. I am sure I would do anything to have him amused, even at my own cost," she added, with another of those sidelong glances; and then, giving a slight squeeze to Adelaide's hand, she turned back to her sofa.

There was a moment of rather awkward

silence as Charles Falkener conducted Adelaide through the hall to her carriage. At last she said,

"I hope you will come to the ball, as Mrs. Falkener seems so much to wish it. It cannot possibly make any difference whether or not I am there."

"But it does make a difference, Miss Snowden—to me it will make all the difference. You do not pretend to suppose there are many women like you in Jamaica? I know none anywhere. I would go a hundred miles for the pleasure of ten minutes' conversation with you; and yet I am an idle man, who do not like taking trouble. Annie was right there: I shall go to the ball if you go, and I shall stay at home otherwise. Will you go?"

"Oh! well, I don't much care. I told my father I should stop at home; but that was because he teases me so about it."

"Why should he tease you? Cannot you do as you please in such a matter as that?"

"I suppose I can—at least, I know I always

do," she added, with a toss of her beautiful head. "I suppose he has a reason, and I suppose I know it, but I don't see why I should tell you, Mr. Falkener."

"Well, now, I *do* see why, Miss Snowden. But I think I will not express it. If you see no cause for ever disputing your father's will, it is not for me to gainsay you."

He said this in a lower voice, and turned aside, as if he were going to leave her.

"Why, have I not just told you I do gainsay him—that he wants me to go, and I will not?"

"I meant something more than that, Adelaide—Miss Snowden—I beg your pardon. Your father may have special reasons for wishing you to go to young Johnstone's ball, which are not difficult to guess when I look at the most beautiful girl in Jamaica. And I do not think that I am very far mistaken when I believe that Adelaide Snowden is too noble-minded to care for a wealthy marriage, that would probably only be a repetition of some of the drawbacks of her own home."

"What can you mean, Mr. Falkener? You are so very mysterious, that really—" and she stopped short, looking on the ground, and playing with the point of her parasol on the end of a neat little boot that betrayed a pretty foot.

"If you do not understand me, Miss Snowden, there is nothing more to be said, and I only beg your pardon for having said so much."

"And if I do understand you?" she said, looking up full in his face with a slight blush.

"Then I would beg you to go to the ball, because it is better not to contradict your father. But to permit me to watch over you—to protect you, and if necessary to escort you home, should you at any moment find you had rather not remain, and your father be unwilling, or"—lowering his voice—"unable to accompany you."

A strange smile crossed Adelaide's face, and after a brief pause she replied—

"Well, Mr. Falkener, as you are a married man, I suppose there can be no harm in my accepting your proposition, and going to the ball."

His face fell as she alluded so point-blank to the reason which made him a safe protector in her eyes. But recovering himself, he took her hand and said,

"Then you will go?"

"Indeed I will; and, as I go early in the morning, and spend the day there, you will find me for the first dance."

He bowed, and emphatically uttered low thanks.

Adelaide skipped into the carriage, and drove home in a tumult of thoughts and fancies. It seemed to her great fun to receive the marked attentions of a married man. Of course it was quite safe, because it could mean nothing; and it would make all her admirers so furiously jealous. Johnstone would be wild with disappointment; and yet no one could say anything, because Mr. Falkener was a married man. A momentary recollection of the little pale-faced wife, with her childish, uneducated rattle, came before her, but was immediately put aside.

Mrs. Falkener had herself wished Charles

should go to the ball, so that was all right. She remembered he had once called her by her own name, and wondered how he could make such a mistake. The rest of her time she plotted and planned how she should dress for this grand occasion.

Nancy was surprised to find her in such spirits on her return, but shook her head and laughed when Adelaide owned she was going to the ball. Her father was too pleased with her change of intention to chaff her much about her fickleness; and he did not think it necessary to look any deeper than to woman's ordinary caprice for a motive.

The sick young wife saw no more of her husband that day till the late dinner-hour; then he sat silent and moody, and after trying to rouse him by unconnected chatter, in which, however, there was a certain *finesse* and charm, she remained silent, and sat quietly watching him.

CHAPTER IV.

FATAL.

ON Wednesday morning very early, before the day grew hot, Adelaide was on her way to the Johnstones' house. She was warmly received by Mrs. Johnstone in a very bright-coloured cotton gown with an enormous pattern, and by Sarah Johnstone, the elder sister of William, familiarly called Bill, the only son and the hope of the family. Adelaide was left the greater part of the day to the society of Mrs. Johnstone, who was too indolent to take much share in the preparations for the ball; that was left to Sarah, who was constantly appearing and vanishing with vases full of beautiful flowers, packets of wax candles, and trailing lengths of

pink and blue calico. She was surrounded and followed by a small crowd of black servants, who executed her commands very deftly, and kept up a perpetual dialogue, something in the style of a Greek chorus, in which they explained aloud all their young mistress was doing, and the wonderful genius she betrayed in the way in which, with their humble assistance, she decorated the ball-room.

Laudation of each other in some form seemed to be the great family quality of the Johnstones. Mrs. Johnstone sat in a large arm-chair opposite Adelaide in another.

"I am sure," she began, "it is wonderful to see the knack Sarah has for those things; I cannot, for my part, think where she gets it; for though I have done the very best I could for her, yet, you know, my dear, it was impossible to give her the education I had. I was brought up in the first boarding-school of New York. Mrs. Prideaux was the name of the lady at the head of it; and a real lady she was. She always said she was a descendant of 'Prideaux's

Connection.' And I daresay it was true, for I remember Prideaux's Connection was one of the first class-books. I know I had to study it hard, though I don't remember much about it now. There was a great deal about the Jews in it, and that is pretty nearly all I can recollect. Mrs. Prideaux had a very respectable connexion. I don't mean the book connection, my dear, but her friends and acquaintances. At the Easter holidays very few of the girls went home; but we used to have little dramatic pieces at the school, and all the great folks of New York came to see us at it. We had a French Mamselle, and it was French pieces we generally did. You would hardly think it now, my dear, but I was Esther, and did not make a bad one either. I forget how it ended; I think I married Mordecai or Haman, which was it?"

"Have you not read it since in the Bible, Mrs. Johnstone?" maliciously inquired Adelaide.

"I really don't think I have, my dear. You know I hear the Bible when I go to church, and I read it sometimes—very often, I may say.

I am sure I read it a great deal when our poor little Freddy died—mostly every night. But you don't often come upon Esther, you know, my dear; it is rather an out-of-the-way book in the Bible."

"I daresay you have not forgotten all your French, Mrs. Johnstone?"

"Well, really I am afraid I have. What a life we used to lead that poor French creature, to be sure! Her name was Mademoiselle de Champignon, or some such thing; I am not sure it was quite that. I know she was very particular about the "de." She said it showed she was well connected. So we used to make it easy by calling her Mademoiselle De, and leaving out the Champignon altogether. One night three of the bigger girls got a frog out of the garden, and dressed it for Mamselle's supper."

"Oh, how very shocking!" cried Adelaide.

"Well, my dear, it was not exactly a frog; I think the gardener said it was a toad, and I think it was dead when they did it. They put

bread crumbs on it and a hot sauce, and told her it was ' poulet au crapaud.' "

" Was she not very angry?"

" Yes, very, for though she did not eat it, the sight of it, and the thought of eating a nasty poisonous toad, made her quite ill; and the young ladies were shut up in their rooms on bread and water for a day. I think I see Mamselle now! She wore spectacles and took snuff. She was fifty years of age if she was a day, and she was always expecting the arrival of a certain Monsieur Pont, who she said was a great friend of hers. Not one of us had ever seen him, and most of us did not believe there was any such person; and yet she looked out for him every day. Our school was some way out of the town, and the coach passed down the road at a little distance from our entrance. She could see it pass from her bed-room window, and never missed being at the window the hour the coach came. I remember one day I was with her, the coach stopped, and some

gentleman got down. She thought it was Monsieur Pont come at last, and fainted dead away at my feet. Of course it was not Monsieur Pont. I thought it very cruel of him never once to come, when this poor old thing, with the faded ribbons and grizzled hair, was always looking out for him from over her spectacles. Bless me, poor thing, she would be nearly a hundred years of age if she were alive now! Ah! well, my dear, I know I wish I could think some fine noble girl would look out for our Bill with half as much eagerness as old Mademoiselle de Champignon did for Monsieur Pont. And he is worth it, my dear—believe me he is. I daresay you may have been told he has some of the faults of a young man, and I don't mean to say he is quite faultless. Nobody is. But he is a good son, and he would make a good husband; and all he wants to make him run quite straight, is just a good wife to take care of him."

Adelaide shrank back a little from the em-

brace that accompanied these words. Her home experience had not led her to believe that a woman's influence can do much towards keeping a man from drinking, when he has once taken to that low vice: And dreadful as the habit was to her in her father, it seemed a hundred times worse in a younger man. Yet that was the fault public opinion attributed to Bill Johnstone at the age of two-and-twenty.

A few hours later, Adelaide entered the well-lighted room, in radiant beauty. She was dressed in rather deep rose-coloured muslin, with no other flowers than her favourite stephanotis. It was twined in her hair, fell from her shoulders, caught up her dress; and the long tendrils floated away from her as she danced. A double row of magnificent pearls, with a large diamond clasp, was round her throat. She wore diamond ear-rings, but no bracelets on her magnificent white arms. She stood forth from the crowd incomparable in beauty and grace, with a look of command and triumph on her brow. But in her secret heart

she was anxious. Her father had not yet arrived—he was late. Would Charles Falkener be in time to claim her for the first dance? She had so cleverly eluded young Johnstone, that she had avoided having either to accept or refuse. But she had quite determined to tell him she was engaged for the opening of the ball if he asked her.

Mrs. Johnstone saw her eyes continually wandering to the door, and naturally supposed she was anxious for her father's arrival. She even began to turn it in her mind whether the anxiety might not arise from some fear lest Mr. Snowden should, even at that early stage in the proceedings, be somewhat the worse for his frequent potations. Had she watched Adelaide's face much longer, she might have seen a sudden blush of pleasure overspread it, which was not occasioned by her father's approach. Through the open doorway, stopping to shake hands with everybody, coming so leisurely, coming so slowly, never once looking at her, she perceived Charles Falkener. Did he see

her? Would he come to her at once, and save her from the first dreaded waltz with young Johnstone? She thought he never would have done talking to the mistress of the house, and making her laugh. What could he be saying to her? Now he stops to speak to Sarah: she looked up so pleased that Adelaide began to fancy he was actually asking her to dance.

The violins are striking up—in another second Bill Johnstone, who is making his way in her direction, will be at her side. Suddenly, she hardly knew how, Falkener got across the room, and without having once caught her eye, or seeming to look at her, or know she was there, his arm was round her waist, and, without a word, when the first note of harmony was hardly struck, she was whirling round the room with him, panting with delight, and breathless with the success of his manœuvre. When at last he stopped, he said,

"Will you forgive me for having taken you off so suddenly? I was afraid of waiting a moment, for I saw your enemy coming, and I

wanted to save you all the trouble of refusing him."

What was that mysterious charm in Charles Falkener which seemed to make it unnecessary that he should waste his time in the usual *banal* expressions about health and weather when he first spoke to you? Adelaide remembered that she had never known him open his conversation with her by a common "How do you do?" He stepped at once *in medias res.* He took up the subject where he had left it a week ago; or he began by some remark that arrested your full attention at once, and seemed to put you on a footing of greater intimacy than any amount of talk about *la pluie et le beau temps* could ever do. There was never any ice to break with him, and yet he was more than respectful in his way of addressing a woman, for he was deferential.

"Oh! Mr. Falkener," exclaimed Adelaide, "do look at Bill Johnstone, how he is scowling at us! He is not dancing, but leaning against that pillar. Sarah has gone up to speak to him.

She is trying to draw him away, and he will not move; and here comes my father. He stands still, as if he were stuck, and is as red as a turkey-cock at seeing I am not dancing with Johnstone."

Mr. Falkener made no other reply than by starting his partner off again, taking pains each time to pass as near as possible before the disappointed lover and the angry father. They waltzed on, Adelaide in wild spirits, and every now and then exclaiming,

"What fun this is! I wish we could go on all night."

When the dance was over, Mr. Falkener led her to her chair, and hanging for a moment over her, as with parted lips and eyes full of pleasure she looked up at him, he said,

"Now will you do me a favour? Promise me you will dance with Bill Johnstone—once, twice, three times, if he asks you. I shall not venture to ask for that honour again to-night," he continued, with a thrilling voice. "I must not make people talk. But be quite sure I shall

be near you all the evening. I shall not lose a look or a step of yours. And I shall be ready to come forward if I see a shadow of anxiety or displeasure pass over your face. Above all, if for any reason I need not explain, you want to go home, raise your finger to your lips, and I will instantly be by your side, and take you to your carriage. I have already taken care it shall be where I can find it at any moment, early or late. And now farewell."

He did not give her time to answer. He gave her one deep, silent look, turned away, and was lost in the crowd.

It was all rather strange, and very delicious. It was delightful to feel she was watched over in this mysterious way by such a person as Charles Falkener, so beautiful, so manly. Adelaide's imagination swam in rapture. She was quite indifferent to her father's vexation, as he gruffly demanded how it happened that she had not been dancing with Mr. Johnstone.

"For no worse reason than because he never asked me, father. Mr. Falkener was kind

enough to step forward. But for him I suppose I should have been left a wallflower, unless some other of my old friends had taken compassion on me."

She said this with a smile, as several young men came pressing forward, all eager to talk to the beauty of Jamaica, all anxious to claim her for a dance, each jealous of the other. Before her father could get in another word she was surrounded and carried off. He followed her with his eyes, and looked pleased.

"By Jove! she is the most splendid girl I ever saw. But she shall marry Bill Johnstone."

That gentleman was not long before he claimed his turn in the dance with Adelaide Snowden. He seemed indeed to consider that, as the ball was given for her, he had a right to monopolize her nearly half the evening. And when he came for the fourth time to claim her hand and found her otherwise engaged, he murmured a little too openly at his fate.

"Come now, Miss Adelaide, that's too bad. I made sure of you for the last waltz be-

fore supper, as well as the first afterwards."

"What made you so confident, Mr. Johnstone? I never promised you."

"The wish was father to the thought, I suppose. I look on this ball as instituted for you and me, and I am jealous of every one else in the room."

"I am very much flattered by your considering the ball as specially for me; but I don't admire your modesty in coupling yourself with it *and* me. Did you flatter yourself I should disappoint all my other friends, and confine myself to dancing with you?"

"Don't be too hard upon a fellow, Miss Adelaide. I should like you to *see* what I thought rather than to *hear* it."

"As you are less transparent than you are brilliant, I should find that a little difficult."

"I do so hate putting the dots on the eyes, as they say in French. I thought you would understand me, because you are so clever. What is that confounded fellow Charles Falkener so fond of staring this way for, I should

like to know. Perhaps you can tell me, Miss Snowden."

"Really, Mr. Johnstone, you become so very *exigeant* on my powers of perception and divination, that I shall have to give up all hope of realising your expectations in any way. I suppose Mr. Falkener has an equal right with any one else to make use of his eyes. My old nurse used to tell me that a cat may look at a king." Adelaide's eyes wandered in the same direction as Johnstone's; and the latter, having partly turned from her to scowl at his enemy, she gave one smile, one peculiar glance at Falkener, intended to reassure that gentleman that all was going well, and that there was no immediate need for his interference. Perhaps Johnstone detected some answering expression on his rival's face, for he turned sharply round upon Adelaide, and said savagely,

"I wish you would give me leave to kick that puppy downstairs. I never saw anything to equal his impudence."

Adelaide laughed.

"No, really, Mr. Johnstone, I cannot give you leave to do anything of the sort. I do not see what you have to complain of. If you do not mean anybody to see, there is nothing for it but to put out the lights."

"I wish to heaven I could!" he murmured in reply.

She put her hand on his shoulder as she spoke; and in a second she was whirling through that waltz which she had promised to another partner. She was laughing gleefully, and making Johnstone notice the blind way in which the near-sighted gentleman to whom that waltz belonged was peering about for her.

"He is actually seeking me among the wall-flowers!" And off she started again, giddy with youth and mischief; while Johnstone, more than ever in danger of losing his head as well as his heart, began to feel that all he desired was before him. Charles Falkener stood watching, and a dark cloud settled on his brow.

When the dance was over, Adelaide found

herself close to Mr. Oliver Standing, the disappointed partner.

"I conclude you could not find me, Mr. Standing," she said. "I waited till the waltz had begun, and then, as you did not appear and I could not sit still, I accepted another partner."

Mr. Standing looked as if he did not believe it, and scowled at Johnstone.

"I reached the place where you were sitting, Miss Snowden, just as the first note struck up, and in time to see you stand up with Mr. Johnstone. Of course the master of the house has the first claim to the belle of the night. But I shall ask you for the first waltz after supper." And with a very low bow he turned away.

"Cool, isn't it?" said Adelaide, with a slight blush. "He did not even wait to hear if I accepted his demand to dance with him."

"And you won't, you know. I am going to take you to supper, and I am going to dance with you afterwards. And Mr. Standing may

stand a little longer before he shall waltz with you."

Adelaide Snowden was not one of those young ladies who affect to live upon air, and disclaim anything beyond a biscuit and a glass of cold water. Enjoyment in every shape and of every kind was what her warm, voluptuous nature craved. She had no notion of being interesting by looking pale and thin. The deep, thick chest, the large, wide-open velvet eyes, and the rope-like coils of black hair, betokened the strength and energy of her nature, and the unscrupulous calm with which she took all that responded to it, or that helped to maintain it. And yet she might have been a grand character, had she been more disciplined.

Johnstone delighted to see her with a certain quiet intention and purpose, eating cold chicken and drinking her glass of champagne. It seemed to encourage him to take a whole glass to himself for each sip of hers. His eyes became more glittering, and his breath near her cheek was hotter, as the hours went by.

But it was not till that fatally promised waltz, after a long time spent in chatting at the supper-table, that Adelaide began to dread the consequences of her silly encouragement of a man she despised, and to find she had gone too far. The waltz was not very steady, and Johnstone's speech, as it became more impassioned, became also less coherent.

At the close of the valse, young Standing was again approaching.

"No, no," said the half-intoxicated Johnstone, "she is not going to dance with you, so stand back, Mr. Standing," and half dragging Adelaide after him, he leaned over to the orchestra. "Music quick, my hearties!—strike it up again!—another valse!—another valse!"

The musicians saw how the case stood, and no doubt their sympathies were with Johnstone, the master of the house, and their employer; and before Adelaide could remonstrate, she was whirling round to the noisiest waltz of all the musicians' repertoire, in the rather feeble but very close grasp of her half-drunken partner.

At one corner of the ball-room was a door leading into what was generally used as a small dressing-room, and which opened into a bedroom beyond. It had been hung with coloured calico for the occasion, and a large sofa placed there, with a quantity of flowers; but as compared with the ball-room, it was indifferently lighted. In waltzing, Johnstone approached nearer and nearer to this door, and with one whirl Adelaide found herself inside the door with her partner, whose arm remained round her waist. She was flung down on the sofa, he sitting by her side. She was greatly startled at this sudden move, and, trying to extricate herself, exclaimed—

"Oh! Mr. Johnstone, you frightened me so! I have had enough of dancing, and am very tired. I should like, if you please, to go to my father."

"No, no, my dearest Adelaide—I may call you Adelaide, mayn't I, or Addy?—that is better still—beautiful Addy! Listen to me. You cannot go yet; I want you to love me—to

marry me—you understand? One kiss—just one kiss," and his hot lips touched her shoulder as he crouched by her, his hideous inebriated face close to hers, his arm still round her waist.

Adelaide gave a scream, and starting up, exclaimed, "Let me go! I *will* go to my father!"

"Much use, my beauty, going to your father would be—ha! ha! look at him!" shouted Johnstone, as, rising to his feet without letting go his hold upon her, he dragged her to the French window of the small room opening down to the ground, and showed her her father, far more intoxicated than himself, seated in a low chair in the verandah, surrounded by the black servants of the various guests, drinking something stronger than the champagne that had been already too much for Johnstone; and his ghastly white face looking horrible in the red murky glare of the torches carried by the footmen.

It was a scene like Erebus. There sat her natural protector, drinking and noisy, singing

the refrain of some low nigger song, and jesting familiarly with beings whom, in his sober moments, he scarcely condescended to acknowledge as human.

"Look at him—look at him, my beauty!" said the drunken wretch, as he tried to throw his other arm round her and clasp her tight.

At that moment Oliver Standing bounded forward from the group of servants on the verandah. He had gone to call some lady's carriage, and, already exasperated against Johnstone, all his feelings were roused by seeing him and Adelaide alone together.

"You shall answer for this, and for much more, you ruffian," said Standing, as he leapt in at the window, and stretched out his hand to collar Johnstone.

The latter staggered a moment, which slackened his hold on Adelaide, who made a violent effort to tear herself from his grasp. As she did so the tall figure of Charles Falkener darkened the doorway. He was white as ashes, and his teeth clenched. She rushed into his arms.

He caught her, hurriedly whispering, "Come at once. I have kept my promise. All is ready."

Johnstone, pushed aside by Standing, had left the window clear at that instant. Falkener bounded out, half lifting, half dragging the poor girl who clung to him. With one rush he had cleared the window, the group of servants, and her own besotted father. The carriage stood at a little distance across the gravel, waiting alone under a tree. He lifted her in.

"Don't leave me. Come with me, for God's sake come!"

He did not hesitate a second, but jumped in, and desired the servant to drive to Mr. Snowden's as quickly as possible.

Adelaide sat shrunk up in the corner of the carriage, her face hid in her hands, sobbing convulsively. He let her be for a moment, without speaking to her. Could she have seen him, she would have wondered at his fixed white face. At length he said,

"Calm yourself, Miss Snowden; you are safe now. You were not prudent to go the lengths

you did. I am thankful I was there, and able to keep my promise of watching over you, though I little guessed how much you would need it."

"Oh! don't scold me, dear Mr. Falkener. I meant no harm. Was there ever such an unfortunate girl as I am? You see how it is. What protection can I have in such a father as mine? Oh! I am so unhappy, so miserable!"

He took her hand. The bright moonlight streamed in at the open windows on her tear-stained cheeks and her imploring eyes.

"Poor child!" he said, in a low whispered voice. "Why cannot I protect you?"

"Oh! but you can, Mr. Falkener. Are you not protecting me now? Say that you will always do so. Say that I need not marry Mr. Johnstone. I am sure you do not think I ought. It would only be exchanging one wretched home for another. You will advise me, will you not?"

The beautiful head sank lower till it touched his shoulder, and there rested.

CHAPTER V.

DOWNWARD.

IT was long before Adelaide could subdue her beating pulses, after all the feverish excitement she had gone through, sufficiently to get any rest. When at length her burning eyes closed in sleep, she dreamt she was climbing up steep places with Charles Falkener. Her fingers clutched his hand. Sometimes he seemed to fail her, and she sank half over the precipice; then as suddenly his arm was round her, and they were floating through the air together. It seemed to her that she looked back to the rock she had been scaling with him. There stood his wife, pale as death; and in her arms she held up a little child, as though she would

throw it over. She was conscious in her sleep of a stifled scream, but she thought Charles Falkener's lips touched hers, and she awoke.

Standing at the foot of her bed was Nannie, ready with her cup of coffee, and evidently contemplating with pleasure the darling of her heart, as she lay back on her lace-frilled pillows, with the beautiful disorder of her long hair, the fringed closed lids, and the blush of her feverish dream on her young cheek.

Adelaide started up with a laugh, and throwing her arms round her nurse's neck, kissed her. Then came many questions as to the hour, what had happened?—had her father returned? Mr. Snowden had been brought home on a litter by some of his own negroes, at six o'clock in the morning, very much intoxicated; and Adelaide need not fear his making his appearance the whole of that day. He had gone to bed, and there, no doubt, he would remain till the evening; nor would he probably leave his room even then.

Adelaide's blood curdled at the disgusting

image this brought before her imagination. And it was another such as he that they wanted her to marry! No, no; Charles Falkener had said it must never be. He was so different! Alas! why on the rock stood there that pale young wife?—and why that infant in her arms?

And yet even these thoughts, rapidly as they passed through her brain, could not sober her. She was in wild spirits, and insisted upon Nannie telling her all the gossip she could think of.

"What do they say about the ball, my Nannie? Come, I am sure the servants must have told you a great deal about it."

"Well, now, that is funny, that you who were at the ball, and saw it with your own beautiful eyes, should want to hear about it from an old woman like me, who was not even there, and has only heard about it from Long Jack and such like, who peeped in at the windows, not a bit afraid their faces would be seen in the night as black as they. Ah! and it's about my darling they are all a-talking, too. They say

when you danced you looked like an antelope just a-springing out of a rose-bush, and that all the gentlemen lost their hearts to you. But, my Nini, what is it about young Mr. Johnstone and Mr. Standing? The men say they quarrelled about you, and that you were like to be killed between them, and Mr. Falkener tore in and saved you. And now there is to be a duel, and all about you. Mr. Johnstone swears he will have Mr. Standing's heart's blood, because he wanted to dance with you when you should have danced with him—that's young Johnstone, I mean. And young Falkener will be Mr. Standing's second, and fight Johnstone afterwards, if the first don't kill him. They are all a-talking of it downstairs, and out in the coffee plantation close to the house. I heard them making a song about it as I was coming up to you."

"What do you mean?" screamed Adelaide, half starting out of bed; "Mr. Falkener going to fight a duel?"

"No, no, my pretty, he's only second, and per-

haps the others will finish it before he's wanted."

"Oh, Nannie, how can you be so silly? Seconds don't fight. How you frightened me! It is bad enough already that that fool Johnstone and poor Mr. Standing should have got into a quarrel, for my sake. Thank God it is not Mr. Falkener!"

"Ah, well," responded Nannie, rather mortified that her view of duels was not considered altogether the correct one, "that may be all very well; and perhaps that's how they do those things in England. But I know that *here*, if the first don't finish his man, the second does. What else is the use of him? Lor' bless you, darling, when Mr. Dawson and Mr. Marsh fell out about something or other with Mrs. Dawson, there was a second of the name of Richards walked straight up to Mr. Marsh and blew his brains out with a pistol, because Dawson hadn't done it first. To be sure he had to cut away as hard as he could. But that's how they used to fight duels in Jamaica when I was young."

"But are you serious, Nannie? Is there really going to be a duel? I wish I could prevent it."

"It is of little use your wishing to do that, my Nini. You should have thought of that before you let the men quarrel about you. It's not so easy to stop the blood when you have made the wound. But lor' now, what can anyone expect when it pleases God A'mighty to turn loose on the world a queenie like you, that just looks right through you, and turns your heart all into a jelly like. There'll be fine talking about this duel, you may be sure. I shouldn't wonder if it were to be in the papers. I wonder who will be killed? Some one in course!"

"Nannie, Nannie, you drive me mad! I must know the truth of this. When is it to be?—cannot you find out—and where?"

"How's a body to tell that, my darling? Someone would be for a-stopping of them, if they was to let out all about it. You had just better let them fight it out between them, and

then you marry the best man. But, after all, my Nini, darling, why wouldn't you dance with young Johnstone, as is a fine young gentleman? And is it that you would like Mr. Standing better?"

"Oh, Nannie, it is nothing of the sort! I am not going to have either of them. Certainly not that drunken Johnstone. I have drinking enough, God knows, in my own family."

As she spoke this, her voice trembled; and having risen from her bed, she was rapidly drawing on her dressing-gown, and thrusting her feet into the embroidered slippers that Nannie had placed ready for her.

The old nurse perceived that she was seriously disturbed, and with the ready tact of her subtle nature felt it was no time for bantering. She stood silent and attentive, till her young mistress should speak again. Meanwhile, Adelaide was walking rapidly to and fro, her brow knit and lost in thought. Presently she stopped short in front of Nannie, and said, in a low husky voice,

"I *must* know about this, Nannie. You must get a note taken for me to Mr. Falkener."

The old woman was not wanting in quick discernment, nor even in a sort of shrewd knowledge of the world. She at once perceived all the risk and danger to Adelaide Snowden in this affair, and was anxious the wild girl should show herself as prudent as circumstances would permit.

"Have nothing to do with it, my sweetheart; you cannot prevent it. Men will fight for pretty girls as long as the world lasts. Don't even the wild stags in the great forest cross their horns and throw their rival to the ground, whilst the sleek doe stands by and watches them? Let them be, my darling; it will not do that all Jamaica should mix your name in it. Lie by in your own lair, my pretty. The doe follows her instinct, but the young lady must not be known to be mixed up with such foolish quarrels. A fair name is a fortune, dearie; and you have enough to throw dirt on yours in master yonder."

The tears stood in the woman's flashing eyes as, with a gesture of indignant contempt, she thrust forth her arm in the direction of the drunken man's apartment. For a moment Adelaide was silent. She had never known old Nannie venture so far, or speak so wisely. She was secretly struggling with vexation at having her eagerness restrained, and with mortification at this only too true aspersion on her father's name and her own.

"Never you mind about my name, Nannie; I shall change it as soon as may be. In this case I am the best judge of what I must and will do."

"Change it as soon as you will, my dearie; but remember it's not every man will give gold for copper. If you want a good name in exchange you must see that your own is worth it."

And with a flash of anger in her eyes the old woman moved slowly to the door.

"And so you are going to leave me, are you? now that you see I am in trouble and anxiety.

Oh, it's all very well to call me your dearie, and your sweetheart, and to praise my beauty, but you should have learnt before now, Nannie, that I am no child to be caught by honeyed words; much less a mere doll to be dressed up in smart clothes and looked at. I'm a woman, Nannie—a woman with all a woman's heart. And that's more than you have to refuse me your help now."

Adelaide had begun her appeal with white cheeks curdled with anger, and eyes of red flame. Before she finished, the proud head was bent upon her hands, and turning away from her nurse, her frame shook with convulsive sobs.

For a moment Nannie still hesitated.

Nature was strong in both women. Education and restraint had done very little more for one than for the other. An intense affection, the result of instinct, habit, and mutual support, existed in each. Principle there was none. But the old tenacity of the servant's devotion to her mistress was sure to win the day, and,

in another moment, Nannie was gently drawing away the hands from the tear-stained cheeks of the passionate girl, and promising to do all she desired. In a few minutes more Adelaide had written to Charles Falkener in these terms:

"I hear there is to be a duel. What does it all mean? Am I compromised in any way? Prevent the duel if possible, for I am told you are second to Mr. Standing. Let me know the where and the when. You may trust me. Perhaps it is, after all, only idle gossip. If so, forget I have written."

Adelaide added, in a postscript,

"How is your wife? I hope nothing of this will reach her ears and make her anxious. You may trust your answer to the bearer, but address it to Nannie, my nurse, and not to me."

Adelaide's conscience was uneasy. The inquiry after Falkener's wife was a sop to Cerberus. She was going on blindly. Of course she meant no harm. What had her dream meant? But then who can help their dreams?

It was decided that Nannie should send the

note by an old woman engaged in hoeing in the plantations, and who would readily believe it was about something Mr. Falkener wanted for his wife; and the answer was to be brought back straight to her.

This anxiety partly over, Adelaide's spirits rose again. She resumed her daily delightful task of following out all the details of her luxurious toilet: her bath, her breakfast; the long twistings of her luxuriant hair; Nannie and a younger maid presiding, and the spoilt child meanwhile chatting gaily with both, or reading such idle books as the circulating library could afford.

But as the day drew on, Adelaide's anxiety increased. There was a death-like silence through the house; her father lay sunk in his ignominious slumbers; the black servants reclined under the verandah, and beneath their little tents of matting, and slept away the share they had had in last night's dissipation. The hours crept through their sultry length, and Adelaide watched or dozed, according as

the heat overcame her, or her restless thoughts stung her into watchfulness. At length her dusky messenger returned, and brought a letter carefully sealed and directed to Nannie, who carried it straight to her mistress, nor failed to notice the quick blood mantle in her face as she stretched out her hand to take it.

It ran thus:—

"DEAR MISS SNOWDEN,—I am sorry you should be annoyed by this foolish affair. Do you not know I am almost forgetting my honour as a gentleman's second in giving you any particulars? I have tried in vain to patch it up. To-morrow, at 4 A.M., under the solitary tamarind in the Beehive Valley. I will immediately let you know the result, addressed as this is.

"Yours, faithfully, C. F."

The letter dropped from her hand. Then, and not till then, the whole truth of the matter stamped itself with force upon her brain. The

creature of rapid impulses, which came and went like the gleams of light on the ever-changing sea, Adelaide had seemed for an hour in the morning partly to realize what had happened. But her sensuous nature was easily diverted by other impressions to less serious reflections, and beyond a vague anxiety, she had already nearly lost sight of the fact that perhaps she had been the cause, however innocently, of a quarrel which might end in bloodshed. The very calmness, almost coldness, of Charles Falkener's letter struck upon her vivid imagination with alarm and pain. She had begun her note to him abruptly. He had, on the contrary, observed all the rules of etiquette. And she found herself almost vexed and annoyed that he had done so, as if it reflected on her own more emotional letter. But these very thoughts were joined to the horror of the fact that to-morrow's sun might raise his glaring eye on the dead body of one whom she had known from her childhood, and who, with all his terrible faults of dissipation, was not with-

out his generous qualities, and was the idol of his mother and sister. Or else that Mr. Standing might be the victim, a young man known chiefly for his quiet excellence and gentlemanly conduct; and that in either case she was mixed up in it, and through her Charles Falkener, that hero of her weak and wayward heart.

How should she bear it? How should she sit through the day, the night, the early dawn, and endure to wait till Charles Falkener should send to her again? It was impossible. Inaction to a mind like hers, under the pressure of anxiety, was more than she could bear, and half an hour had not elapsed from her receiving Falkener's letter before her plans were laid, and she was resolved to be there.

As the evening approached, and the sultry heat declined, Adelaide sent orders to bring round her horse. She told Nannie that she felt a ride in the cool of the evening would refresh her; and presently she set forth accompanied by Long Jack, for a ride which necessarily took her through the Beehive Valley. It

was not that Adelaide was not acquainted with the locality that she wanted to see it; but as the next time she should be there it would be necessary to be very certain of what she meant to do, she was resolved to reconnoitre the spot beforehand. This she could only do by just passing through the valley, and near the solitary tamarind. Any delay or evident investigation might give rise to strange remarks afterwards, if Long Jack should happen to observe some peculiarity in his mistress's manner. Adelaide remembered that at the entrance of the valley from the road which she would take, and which she calculated was not the same as that likely to be chosen by the combatants, there were some rocky banks, and that portions of the rock had become detached, and lay in the furrow of the valley at its narrowest part, and being partially covered with vegetation would form an excellent covert for her.

She gave a penetrating glance as she passed along, but was afraid to linger. The whole scene was stereotyped upon her mind, and she

was sure she should find again the exact spot where she then resolved to remain concealed. Having walked her horse through this rough and rugged defile, she cantered quickly through the wider space, in the very centre of which stood the solitary tamarind, a splendid specimen of its kind. She shuddered as she passed beneath the cool breath of its quivering light green foliage. The small feathery leaves dappled the ground with their restless shadows. The humming-birds who haunt it as their favourite tree, were murmuring their evening song, and the fresh breeze that awakes at that hour was playing among the slender lithesome branches, as with the strings of a harp. And was this to be the scene of a duel, of bloodshed, perhaps of death?

When Adelaide reached her home again she found Nannie very much excited. Mr. Snowden had sent for her as he lay in bed, and had talked in a wild and confused way about Adelaide, charging the poor woman to watch her narrowly, for harm would come to her, to both, if she did not. Adelaide, he said, was to marry young

Johnstone; he would see to that. Falkener was a rascal; Standing was a sneak; Johnstone was the man for him. Then he wanted to know how Adelaide had come home that night, or rather that morning, from the ball; and what Long Jack had meant when he said the young lady had him she liked best to take care of her. In short, he was all but raving; suspicious of mischief, but unable sufficiently to govern his thoughts to know quite what he was afraid of. He ended, however, in making Nannie swear, literally swear, with her hands laid across each other at the wrists, according to an old superstition, that she would sleep in Adelaide's room that night.

Here was a fresh complication! The only way to meet it was one well suited at that moment to Adelaide's state of nerves. She flew into a passion; protested she never could sleep with anyone in the room; and, finally, so far carried her point that poor Nannie was doomed to sleep upon a mat, not in the room, but just outside in the corridor; a not unusual proceed-

ing in those hot countries among the native servants.

Nannie was satisfied by this arrangement, not for a moment imagining there was any real danger. She never reflected that the external blinds, the fact of its being a one-storied house (there are none higher in Jamaica), the verandah, and the long coils of Adelaide's favourite stephanotis, made egress by the window not an absolute impossibility for anyone so supple-limbed and resolute as her young mistress.

Mr. Snowden never raised his heavy aching head from his pillow that day. Adelaide met trays of soda-water, lime-juice, and such like cooling beverages, being carried from time to time into the gloom of his closed chamber; but she did not penetrate thither herself, or send, or ask for any message. There was little love in her heart for her father; and his feeling for her was rather a sort of passionate instinct than a true and noble affection.

The evening found Adelaide again seated

under the verandah beneath the tendrils of the strong-scented stephanotas, looking forth over the terraced garden down the wooded defile which concealed the Beehive Valley. Amidst the waving ocean of varied green her eye could detect a break; and she knew that indicated the open space where stood the tamarind that was to witness to-morrow's tragedy.

The sun had sunk in sudden darkness. The white moon was shedding silver sparkles, like the sheen of running water, on every leaf and every spray. It drew a hard clear line along the edges of the rocks and the angles of the houses; its deceitful light and shadow cheated you as to size and distance, making that seem near which was far off, sinking deep dark gulfs where all was smooth and even, and hiding real precipices and declivities with the glance of its white glitter; making, in short, everything unreal and intangible, like the wayward spirit world of which it would seem to be the governing planet.

It was very late before Adelaide slowly rose

from her low cane-chair in the verandah, and, without deigning to make any further remark to Nannie about her father's galling injunction, passed haughtily to her room. Nannie stood at the door, and threw a sidelong, half-timid glance at the proud, outraged girl, as, with face averted, she passed into her chamber, merely waving off Nannie with her hand, and saying, in a low voice—

"I do not want your assistance to-night."

The tears sprang to the nurse's eyes, but as she knew remonstrance was in vain she wrapped herself up in her mat, and curling round her supple limbs like a dog, was soon asleep.

Adelaide turned the key of the door very noiselessly. She took off her long evening dress, laid ready on a chair a short walking-costume, set a little low-voiced alarum clock at the hour of a quarter to three, and then, without further undressing, lay down on her bed. Youth and weariness soon plunged her into a deep sleep, from which the first whirr of the alarum suddenly tore her. She quietly arose, and made

her hasty toilet with trembling hands. Her window opened to the ground, and beneath it was the slight latticed frame of the verandah, covered with creepers. Adelaide laid hold of the sill of the window, and having fastened her dress around her tight enough to prevent her skirts clinging to the branches, and yet not too tight to leave her freedom of motion, she resolutely flung her feet down over the sloping roof of the verandah till they touched its outer edge. Then came the perilous moment. Would the fragile woodwork maintain her weight when she withdrew her hands from the clasped window-sill? At least the effort had to be made, and her trust in her own wonderful agility, combined with remarkable strength in so young and slight a form, prevented any diffidence in her own powers. She seemed to loose her hold by her fingers, and concentrate it in her feet, and arch up her lithe form until she brought her hands to where her feet were, and then lightly let herself noiselessly drop to the ground with the elasticity of a feline creature.

That feat once achieved there was no further difficulty. Only the danger of meeting some one and being recognized. But she had covered herself with a dark cloak, and felt sure that, even if the negroes should already be slowly sauntering towards the sugar plantations, they would never guess it could be anyone but a servant of the house. Besides, it was still too early for the labourers to be astir.

She ran across the lawn, and leaped down the stone steps that led from one terrace to another, till she had safely entered the sheltering gloom of the wood which covered the lower part of the shelving land. Here she was safe. She knew every winding path, and avoiding the main roads, crept along the sinuous ways that had been made here and there by the natives taking short cuts as they went from their distant villages to their work in her father's plantations. The birds were waking with the early morn. It was not the full song of our northern woods, but many a cheery chirp, a musical scream, an oft-repeated, solitary note, and then

the swift rustle of wings, and the whispering chatter or low buzzing sound of birds whose glorious plumage has to do duty for melody; —the obvious harmony of colour, instead of the subtle inspiring harmony of sound.

Adelaide saw it all, felt it all, but at the time was unconscious that she did so. It made that deep, intense impression on her memory which we are only capable of receiving in moments of great excitement. Her whole being was strung to the highest pitch, including her powers of observation. But the agony of her thoughts, the terror and suspense of her feelings, prevented the inner consciousness of how her intellect was at work. Only long after, certain natural sounds, the sight of certain wild-flowers, always recalled the Beehive Valley to her memory, and shot through her brain with a sudden pang like the echo of a past agony. The vision would come before her in scenes utterly unlike those that then surrounded her. There were blades of grass and silvan weeds that spoke a language to her unknown to others.

It was a language of horror and of bloodshed, never quite forgotten to her dying day.

Swiftly and stealthily Adelaide forced her way through overhanging boughs and tangled climbing plants, till she came upon the rocks that skirted the wood, and formed here and there a broken rampart on either side of the narrow green sward, near the centre of which stood the solitary tamarind. She knew well which was the rock she had fixed upon in her own mind as her covert during the terrible scene which had such a fascination to her excited imagination. A stunted cedar that had been too crowded in by other trees to spread out its huge branches at pleasure, grew on one side of the rock, and while its boughs hung low enough in front to screen her from others, there was a narrow vista left by its dark foliage, through which she could command a view of the entire valley up and down. The rock was of a grey colour, and partially covered with a brown-green lichen.

Adelaide had wrapped herself in a thin burn-

ous nearly of the same colour, and had on a dark coloured hat, out of which she had neglected to take the white feather, the only thing that made a speck of light on the grey and brown shades that surrounded her. Moreover, she counted not a little on the intense interest in their own fate of the actors in this awful drama, to prevent any eye idly glancing round to the spot where she was, and which, so far as she could judge, was about three hundred paces from where the combatants would stand.

It seemed to her that an hour had passed as she waited there, feeling so cold and chill even in the hot air of a Jamaica morning. The birds flitted in and out of the open space before her, calling to each other as they found some dainty morsel for their early meal. She heard the buzzing of the multitudinous insect life awakening with the morn on the vegetation and in the crannied rocks around her. The numerous squirrels that people the woods of Jamaica were leaping from bough to bough, uttering

their little chattering cry and cracking nuts in their green bowers above her head.

In cooler moments she would have been afraid of the possible venomous creatures that might crawl out of their hidden lairs; but with what was coming all sense of her position, the risks, the growing heat, the fear of detection, all was lost in the agony of waiting.

Presently, as she strained her ears to cut off the hum of bird and insect life from sounds that might indicate the approach of man, she thought she heard the muffled noise of horses' feet on the long thick grass in the wood on the opposite side of the narrow valley, and the crackling of dry branches that lay on the ground as the wheels passed over them. She thought they would have come to the rendezvous on foot or on horseback; she wondered why they brought a carriage. The horses' heads were towards her as they emerged from the wood in front, and she recognised Mr. Falkener's pair of greys, that she had always so much admired. It was his own servant who was driving, who had

lived with him since Mr. Falkener had been in the island, and whom he had always spoken of as trustworthy and devoted.

Adelaide's heart beat fast. There were three men in the open carriage. She saw Charles first, because he alighted first; then young Johnstone stepped out; and finally another man, whom she did not know. She wondered why he had come, and who he was. He took a small packet out of the carriage as he closed the door and put up the steps, and he carried it under his arm. Still she wondered. He was thick-set, and rather stout. His face was grave and his manner calm and collected.

Johnstone walked away, leaning on Falkener's arm; and it was the third man who gave orders to the coachman where to stand at some little distance in the wood, and nearly out of sight. Johnstone and Falkener had walked slowly on, with their backs to where Adelaide stood. Presently they turned in the contrary direction, and instinctively she crouched down behind the rock, for fear of being seen; but

curiosity mastered every other sentiment, and soon she ventured to look again. They came on nearer and nearer, but neither saw her. Even Falkener, who might have supposed she was somewhere near, showed no sign of having any thought beyond the solemn occasion which had brought him there. Johnstone was talking to him rather eagerly—he was very pale, and his eye was haggard. Nevertheless, the gravity of his position had stamped a dignity on his young, good-looking, but not intellectual face, that Adelaide had never seen before. The full, rather too full, red lips had assumed an expression hitherto unknown to her; the large brown eyes had grown darker and deeper. He had always a trick of pushing back his thick, curly hair from his smooth, boyish forehead; he did it now again and again. Perhaps he had learnt the trick because he knew he had a very beautiful white hand. The hand was white still, and the trick remained; but the motive was all out of place and forgotten now. He wore a seal ring of great beauty. Adelaide

saw him point to it, and with a faint blush say something to Falkener, who nodded assent, and for a moment looked very grave.

Falkener's manner—for Adelaide could hear no words—was that of a man trying to make the best of things, bent on being self-possessed and cheerful. But he had a bright, hectic spot on either cheek; and there was an unnatural glitter in his eyes. And so they walked backwards and forwards, while the third man stood still, looking on, and with his back against a tree.

Every now and then Johnstone pulled out his watch with a jerk of impatience. Evidently he wanted it over, this thing, this event, which was to be death to him or to another man! Presently sounds of approaching footsteps reached their ears. The stranger was the first to catch it, because he was standing still. He called to Mr. Falkener, who, with Johnstone, turned quickly and came up to him. At the same moment Adelaide saw Mr. Standing coming up on horseback, and by his side rode Mr.

Marsh, a gentleman she scarcely knew, though she had danced with him once at that fatal ball. He had a certain military air, and did not seem to look on the occasion with as much gravity as the others. He was older than any of the other men, and rather pompous in his manner. Mr. Standing was pale, less excited than Johnstone, and slower in all his movements. The seconds counted the paces. The two combatants shook hands before taking their places. Johnstone seemed to give some last injunction to Falkener; but Standing did not speak again after shaking hands with his adversary, making him at the same time a short stiff bow, as part of a ceremony that he performed more because it was a gentlemanly proceeding than from anything approaching to the disturbed emotion which betrayed itself in poor Johnstone's face. The men took their stand on the green sward, after each throwing off their coats. Johnstone had sent the challenge, therefore Standing was to fire first.

Adelaide's eyeballs ached with their fixed

straining—she felt her knees bending beneath her—she began wondering why she had come. It was unmaidenly, it was altogether unheard of. What were these men to her that she should have thrust herself on such a scene? But it was too late for repentance, and too late for retreat. Her trembling fingers dug themselves deeper into the hard soil and clinging ivy which here and there covered the rock; but for that support she could not have stood upright.

In a moment she saw the smoke, the flash, and after these, heard the sharp click of Standing's discharge. Johnstone seemed to fire almost at the same instant. She closed her eyes the half of a second. Both men were standing untouched when she looked again. It flashed across her thoughts that it must be over now. Surely, having fired and missed, they would separate. God grant it! The seconds stepped forward, some words were spoken, she could not hear what; but the seconds again both stepped aside. Standing raised his pistol, and at the

same moment that that horrid report seemed to tear her brain, she saw Johnstone fling up both his arms, and fall with a heavy thud forward on his face.

She uttered a wild shriek, and hid her face on the rock. The shot, the woman's scream, and the fall of Johnstone's helpless form seemed simultaneous. Falkener started and looked wildly round. He detected a white speck amid the dark distant foliage. It was the feather on Adelaide's hat; and he knew she was there. It seemed to her, when she reflected on it afterwards, that for a moment her senses had left her; but when she again opened her eyes she saw that the gentleman who had stood near a tree, and who she now knew must be the surgeon, had advanced towards Johnstone's prostrate form. They had raised him a little; Falkener and Marsh propped him up against their knees and held his head. Their eyes were fixed on the surgeon's face. Her nerves were so strained to their utmost bent that, though before she had not caught one word of what had been said

in the conversation which she perceived had gone on previous to the event, now she heard quite distinctly, and yet as if the sound came to her from an untold distance miles away, floating, or rather darting, through the hot silence, the few hopeless words—"*Shot through the heart.*"

The tension was over; her nature gave way; she could bear no more; her tears fell fast; her bosom was torn with sobs. The group of sad, silent men were far too absorbed in the terrible task before them to hear or see the unhappy girl, as she still strove to prop herself up against the projecting rock, that she might watch all to the end.

Marsh was endeavouring to draw Standing from the scene, and hurry his departure; but Standing stood rooted to the spot, gazing with a face of despair on the dead form of his friend, whom he had murdered, lying at his feet. They had torn open his shirt. Adelaide could see the thin streak of crimson where the ball had entered. The face was white and calm, the lips

parted, as if so congealed as the last breath passed out and the soul winged its way to eternity and to judgment.

Falkener disengaged himself from the group, and went to call the carriage forward. They lifted up the body and placed it on the floor of the carriage. Not till this was done could Marsh succeed in tearing Standing away, although his flight and concealment, even in Jamaica, was a matter of such importance to himself. The surgeon entered the carriage; but to Adelaide's surprise Falkener remained outside, and, closing the door, gave orders to the coachman, who drove off, leaving Falkener standing.

For a moment he looked around him, as though to see that nothing had been left on the ground, and then advanced towards her. By this time she was sobbing violently, and in danger of losing all her self-control. He approached her with his face set in a rigid pallor, livid shadows round his lips and beneath his eyes. His countenance was stern and terrible. She held out both her arms, as if she would

have fallen on him for support, and with broken sobs exclaimed,

"Oh! it is too dreadful—too dreadful! I cannot bear it! Take me away, Mr. Falkener. I shall go mad if I remain! Take me away!"

She clung to him, she clasped his arm, she seemed to forget everything in the overwhelming sense of her own weakness, and her horror at what she had just witnessed. Falkener passed his arm round her to support her; but he looked down upon her tear-stained face with a gaze of stern inquiry. At last, in a cold, husky voice, he said,

"Adelaide, why are you here?"

"Indeed," exclaimed the agitated girl, "I do not know why I came. I could not rest. I feel it was all my fault, and that I must know how it ended. And now he is dead. His blood is on my hands. Oh! Charles, Charles, what shall I do? Speak to me, for God's sake!"

Still Falkener did not answer her. She clung closer, lifting her tearful face to his. At last he said,

"You loved him, Adelaide."

"No, no, you mistake me," she exclaimed, and bowed her head down on his arm. "I had no feeling for him at all, except that of having known him from my infancy. We were children together. That alone, and less than that, were enough to make it horrible that I should in any way be the cause of his death."

"And you *were* the cause of it, Adelaide. His last words to me were about you, his last request that if he fell—and, God knows poor fellow," added Falkener, in a voice of agony, "he deserved a better fate—I would take the seal ring from his finger and convey it to you. And that I will do. They have taken him to my house. I cannot stop. I must leave you now. I am broken to pieces by this horrid event. Adelaide, tell me, on your honour as a woman, *did* you care for that poor fellow?"

"Do not distress me, Mr. Falkener, by seeming to doubt my word. Could any woman witness what I have done, and remain unmoved? Shot through the heart!—shot through the

heart! I shall hear it to my dying day."

"Calm yourself, Adelaide, for I must leave you. How will you get home?"

"How indeed? I must make haste, or I shall be found out. Are you not afraid of the shock to your wife, if they take the body into your house?"

"My orders were all given beforehand, in case of the worst. I hope she will know nothing about it. She is very ill, and I have had trouble enough in this without anything more happening."

He spoke in tones of the utmost dejection, and as he did so, Adelaide seemed to press the arm she was clinging to a little closer to her heart.

"Tell me," she said, "when and how I can see you again. I cannot bear the images with which my memory will now be filled, if I cannot talk it out with some one."

"Tell me where I shall meet you," replied Falkener.

"Come to the oleander grove at the end of

the shrubbery-walk behind our house to-night, at half-past nine. I must see you. I must relieve my mind by saying and hearing all. There can be no harm in it; and we shall be safe there."

"God bless you, you poor agitated child! Get home as quickly as you can, and take care no one finds out where you have been. I doubt we have not heard the last of this sad story, Adelaide; and you will need all your courage to bear up against the things that may be said."

"I shall trust to you, Mr. Falkener. I will do all you tell me."

She disengaged herself from his supporting arm, and turned her tottering steps towards the homeward path. Falkener moved away quickly, and as she turned to look after him, she saw him bounding along through the wood on the opposite side of the valley, and soon he was lost to sight amongst the thick foliage.

A little longer she heard the crackling of the boughs as he pushed on in his eager course; then all was silent. The little birds had re-

sumed their chatter; a squirrel overhead dropped a nut at her feet; two humming-birds, pursuing each other, flitted just before her; the buzz of insect life was all around her as she passed into the giddy maze of thousands of airy midges dancing in a sunbeam; a large bright-winged butterfly paused for a second in front of her, and she began slowly to drag her weary limbs up the wooded bank, muttering between her teeth, "Shot through the heart!—shot through the heart!"

CHAPTER VI.

FAMILY SCENES.

WHEN Adelaide had escaped from her home she had taken the precaution to put the key of her door in the pocket of the white dress which she wore under her dark cloak. To return through the window by which she had made her exit was of course impossible. It was getting late in the bright hot morning of a Jamaica day, and she had to run all the possible risks of being recognised as she approached the house.

This, however, caused her but little anxiety. Her freaks of early rising and unwarrantable wanderings were not a novelty to the household, Her father was not likely to see her; and no

one dare question her, unless, perchance, it might be Nannie; but then an answer was always at hand for her.

The faithful woman had risen from her night watch on the mat in front of Adelaide's door. Before going about her work she had tried the lock, and finding it closed she concluded her young charge was asleep, and would unfasten the door when either her wants or her whims made it convenient to do so. Without, therefore, a misgiving of what had happened to her caged bird, she turned away to join the rest of the household. Meanwhile, Adelaide was slowly mounting the terraced garden. The negroes were already in the coffee plantations to her right, and, as ill-luck would have it, she saw her old enemy, Long Jack, returning to the verandah of the house from delivering some message to the overseer, who was setting the various members of his dark-complexioned band to work. Jack made a great pretence of being absorbed in reinstating the fallen tendrils of the disordered stephanotis, and was expressing

aloud to himself, in his negro dialect, his surprise at the condition in which he found it. Adelaide passed under the verandah to his left, and as she did so was perfectly conscious of the intentional malice of his muttered remarks. He glanced from the long trailing tendrils he held in his hand, up to the casement of her room above, which, however, she had had presence of mind enough to leave covered by the external matting, which is often all the protection from the refreshing night-air which is needed in those hot climes, where the windows are left open while the sun is shaded off.

"Eh, my pretty flower," he was half-muttering, half-humming to himself, "did the wild antelope leap from her lair and drag you down with her slender legs; or did the white dove break from her nest and drag you on her soft bosom after her?

'Hey ho for Jenny, hey ho, Jenny!
Jenny out the kitchen ran,
Jenny leapt the milking-pan,
Jenny goes to meet her Dan,
Who shall stop Jenny?

Hey ho for Jenny, hey ho, Jenny!
Massa calls for Jenny now.
What a buzz and what a row—
Tie poor Jenny to a bough.
Kiss poor Jenny,
Whip poor Jenny,
Heigho for Jenny!' "

Adelaide's cheek burnt as she passed the long ungainly negro, and saw his malicious grin, while he pulled a lock of his crisp hair, and affected to make her a low bow, and to wish "good morning to lovely Missy, as had been gathering roses in the dew to put in her cheeks, no doubt. Had she any orders for poor Jack this morning about her horse?" She passed him swiftly without a word, loathing the servile familiarity of the hated race, and not deigning to acknowledge him by a glance.

Once alone in her room, with the door again safely locked, Adelaide began to feel how broken to pieces she was with the scenes she had gone through. She proceeded to put away all her clothes, as though nothing had happened, in order that Nannie might find them undis-

turbed when she should come to call her. She hung up her cloak and her white dress, and without losing a moment slipped into her hammock, thinking it, however, best to unlock the door before doing so. How her head swam as she laid it on the pillow, and drew a light covering of blue silk over her feet.

The comparative repose of her tired body gave an additional vividness to her impressions of all that had happened in the dreadful hour and half that she had been absent. A sense of shame and confusion was mingled with the horror. She recollected calling Falkener by his Christian name. To be sure he had done the same by her; but that did not make it any better. She had clung to him, so closely too; what would he think? Then back came the terrible refrain of all her thoughts, "Shot through the heart!—shot through the heart!"

In imagination she followed the terrible procession of the carriage, the surgeon, and that blood-stained corpse, through the wood, past the entrance of Mr. Falkener's pen (all the small

estates in Jamaica with a house upon them are called pens), to the home where Mrs. Falkener lay ill, little knowing the ghastly horror to which her roof gave shelter. Then she wandered in imagination to poor Johnstone's family; his widowed mother, his adoring sister. How would they bear this dreadful blow? Adelaide was not naturally of a compassionate disposition. There was something of the panther in her mood. She had not been nurtured with a reasoning tenderness, but spoilt with servile flattery and adulation. She despised and sometimes hated the native servants of her household, with their low cunning and crouching ways. The long habit of having every whim gratified had fed the passionate instincts of her nature, without developing the milk of human kindness. But whatever sympathy she was capable of was necessarily called forth by the sad occurrence that owed its origin so much to herself and her bewildering beauty. Her silken pillow was wet with tears before the sleep of exhaustion closed her eyes, and brought a

brief respite to her over-burdened memory.

When Nursie, or, as the negro servants called her, Mrs. Nursie, went into the kitchen and the servants' hall that eventful morning, she found the whole household gossiping in the negro dialect about what had happened. She caught some words of a not respectful nature which Long Jack was uttering respecting her young mistress; and this was an offence unpardonable in her eyes.

Being the person of the household in whom the master reposed the most confidence, she was looked up to by all the other domestics as an upper servant. Moreover it was well known she had the master's ear, and that sooner or later whatever she said was sure to bear fruit. Great was her indignation when she heard Long Jack insinuating that his mistress's early walk had any connection with the duel, the news of which had, since five o'clock in the morning, run like wildfire through the country.

Mr. Snowden had slept off all the effects of his dissipation, and was going out for his early

morning ride over his coffee and sugar plantations. Nursie thought it safer he should hear first from herself of the tragedy which was to put an end to all his prospects for his daughter; and as, for some reason or other, Nursie was never denied her master's presence when no one else dared penetrate into his sanctum, she went straight up to his room, where he was still sitting in his dressing-gown, sipping cold brandy and water for breakfast, and smoking a huge cigar.

"Well, Nursie," he said with a cheerful voice on seeing her enter, "what brings you here so early? Take a chair, old girl, and tell me the morning's news. First of all, how's the little bird I confided to your keeping? Somehow or other I never saw her yesterday; I had such a confounded headache."

"She's well enough, Massa, and asleep still, poor little pet, which is better than opening her dear eyes to all the sorrow and trouble of this world."

"It's a good enough world for me, and I

don't see that it has gone so hard with you. As for Missy, there are not many thorns in her path, I guess."

"That's as Massa chooses to take it. Maybe Missy'll be glad, maybe Massa'll be sorry."

"Riddle no riddles to me, old woman. What's up now?"

"There's nothing up; but there's somebody down, and Missy's at the bottom of it."

"D—n the woman! Why can't you speak out? What's the matter?"

"Only that young Massa Standing has shot Massa Johnstone through the heart, and all along of Missy."

"Good God!—you don't mean it!"

And Snowden staggered to his seat, and instantly flying, with the natural instinct of a drunkard, to his one resource, tossed off a remarkably stiff glass of the deadly mixture before him. He lay back for a moment, gasping and white with horror. Then the burning liquid drove the blood to his face, and red and glaring, he insisted on hearing all.

Nursie only knew what the servants had told her. Her own instinct revealed to her, as it did to Adelaide's father, the secret cause of this fatal duel. But Snowden was in despair at the idea that all his schemes had come to an end; and, to do him justice, he was also terribly shocked to think of the sudden death of the handsome stripling to whom he had meant to give his greatest treasure, and whom, in his rude coarse way, he had taught himself to love as his future son-in-law. He paced to and fro in the greatest agitation; now wondering whether the intelligence would have a painful effect upon Adelaide; now pitying from his heart (and after all he had a heart) the bereaved mother and the desolate family; and now grieving over his lost hopes for his daughter. To one of his remarks on this subject, Nursie replied,

"Massa need not fash himself about that. Missy did not care for the young gentleman, and would never have had him."

"You are wrong there, Nursie. He was as likely a young man as any other to win a girl's

heart. Addy is coy and proud; but time would have brought it round; and I meant it to be; and deuced sorry I am the poor lad has been killed in this shocking way. I wish Standing were transported for life; and if I had a word to say in the matter he should be, or my name is not Joe Snowden."

"Massa knows best, and Massa can say what he pleases; but my Missy would never match with young Johnstone, that's dead and gone, any more than the falcon will match with the humming-bird. She did not like him, and she never missed telling me so. Massa's very clever, no doubt; but oil and water don't mix, and God A'mighty Himself couldn't make them."

"Don't irritate me, you obstinate old fool! There's an end of the whole thing, and it's of little use our crying after spilt milk—or spilt blood either, for the matter of that," he added, in a subdued whisper. "The thing to think of now is how we are to tell the poor girl. You say she has not yet been out of her room?"

"No, no, Massa," said Nursie, with the extra

assurance of a person who knows he is telling a lie. "I lay near her all night, and she was still in a deep sleep when I came here."

"I had rather not tell her, Nursie. She might cry or faint, or do something. I never can bear to see a woman cry. I think you had better tell her, old girl. And be sure you tell her how her old father feels for her; but let her bear herself bravely, and I'll find another husband for her, that I will, my beautiful darling. Ah! well, I'm very sorry for that poor lad, that I am, and no mistake. I'd have given ten thousand pounds it had not happened."

Nursie rose to go, accepting with concealed alacrity the mission appointed her. She instinctively felt there was something to conceal on Adelaide's part in all that had happened. The important thing was to prevent any collision between the father and daughter until the way had been prepared; and so, with a mixture of secret contempt and pity at her master's blindness, she bent her way slowly to Adelaide's room.

Adelaide was not asleep when Nursie quietly opened the door, but she pretended to be, and profited by the long shadows of her thick eyelashes to catch a glimpse at Nursie's face through her less than half-opened eyes. Nursie was not taken in by this dodge the least in the world. She knew her darling to her heart's core, and all her little tricks and whims; but she pretended to be persuaded Adelaide was still asleep, and began to creep cautiously about the room, as though afraid of waking her. Her necessary avocations led her in time to the recess where Adelaide had hung up the dark cloak and the white dress of her early morning's escapade. Nursie did not evidently think the latter in its right place, and took it down to put it elsewhere, when her eye was caught by the mark of a blood-stained hand upon the wristband. She turned pale as she saw it, and stood transfixed. Raising her head, she looked across to Adelaide, lying back on the silken pillows of her hammock.

Adelaide saw the strange expression of

Nursie's face, but not the object that occasioned it, so she said softly, "Nursie, is that you?"

Nursie approached her, still holding the white dress, and showing her the crimson stain. "Oh! my dearie, what's this?"

Adelaide's large dark eyes dilated with horror as she looked at her blood-stained dress.

The whole truth flashed on her already excited feelings. It was Johnstone's blood. Falkener had put his arm round her to support her, when she stood sobbing near him, and his hand was still wet with the life-blood of the unhappy man whose body he had helped to lay in the carriage. The horror, mingled with shame, was too much for her. She burst into tears, and ended with a fit of hysterical crying, which quite exhausted her. It was a relief to tell all to Nursie, in whose really unprincipled fidelity she had absolute confidence. Adelaide knew well her power over her old nurse. She knew she exercised that sort of fascination, that there was nothing in which she could not have induced the woman to second her.

Devoid of religion, devoid even of moral principle, Adelaide was to her the personification of all law. She would have assisted her to commit a murder if her darling had been bent on it. She had no conscience outside Adelaide's wishes, or Adelaide's commands. The only law of life was to obey the whims of her beautiful darling. Whatever sentiment bound her to her master was secondary to this. The former was a sentiment in which it would not have been difficult to detect some feeling that was not love now, whatever it might have been; and in a nature like Nursie's, affection took the character of passion. Like passion, it did not fade into indifference so readily as it changed to hate. She did not hate her master, but she might do so. Were he once to treat her ill—ungratefully, *she* would have said—it would not have seemed impossible to Nursie's savage nature to stab the master whose will she had always hitherto obeyed; and, as rumour said, some time in the long-ago past, too far and too blindly. Of this of course Adelaide knew nothing. She only

knew that her power over Nursie was unbounded, and that a secret reposed in her was as safe as the grave.

As Adelaide detailed all she had done that eventful morning, Nursie understood far more of the transaction than did her narrator. Adelaide was, it is true, undisciplined and passionate. There were no chaste barriers erected by education and religion in her mind to check a downward course. It was all instinct, good and bad alike. She never acknowledged to herself that she was falling in love with a man who was not free to return her sentiments of affection. Still less had she any wicked intention of alluring him from his lawful wife. But she just followed the bent of her own feelings, and the accidents of circumstances which conduced to the indulgence of those feelings. She thought Charles Falkener very good and kind to her. She liked him better than anyone she had ever known. She was lonely and unhappy, and yet intoxicated with her own beauty, and restless in the strength and power of her budding

youth. As for what followed, she left everything to take care of itself; and thus she was fast slipping downward, without a pang of remorse, hardly a reflection of anxiety. And Nursie, who saw further and understood better, had no thought of checking the unhappy girl in her perilous course.

At first Nursie was staggered by this torrent of tears, and began to apprehend that after all Adelaide had cared for young Johnstone, and had concealed her real feelings under a pretence of dislike. But, as the tale was unfolded, she found her first impressions had been correct, and that the passion the poor ill-guided girl was nourishing was of a more hopeless nature. And then, by degrees and unresistingly, the old nurse found herself consenting to her darling's wishes, and offering herself yet again as the channel for secret correspondence. It was arranged that that evening Nursie should make some excuse for getting into conversation with Mr. Snowden at the hour Adelaide was to meet Falkener in the garden. Adelaide adduced

many reasons why this meeting was so necessary to her. She must, she said, hear all—how the family had borne the sad intelligence, whether Mr. Standing was in any danger in consequence of the murder—for such, no doubt, it really was, in spite of the world's false code of honour—and whether Mr. Falkener also would be blamed for what had happened.

Nursie was only too easily convinced by this false reasoning, and so engaged herself, once for all, to assist her young mistress in her downward path.

Meanwhile sad and terrible scenes of grief were going on elsewhere. The body had been carried to Mr. Falkener's house, only to allow time to make a more accurate examination. Not that from the first moment there was the least doubt that death had been instantaneous. Mr. Falkener was anxious, on his wife's account, that nothing should transpire at that early hour to awaken her to a knowledge of what had occurred, as she had been more than usually unwell the day previous. He therefore set off

on horseback to break the intelligence to the unhappy family, while the surgeon followed in a conveyance with the body. Terrible indeed was the grief and agony of the doting mother when the horrid truth was conveyed to her startled senses. The whole household had been too weary, and most of the black servants too intoxicated, the day after the ball, to clear away the relics of the night's festivities. The coloured calico still hung on the walls, looking so mean and beggarly in the morning light. The flowers, half faded in their vases, emitted a sickly odour; cups and plates, with the unsightly remains of food left on them, were seen here and there as the guests had put them down. A few fragments of torn muslin, a lost ribbon, or a sprig of some artificial flower, lay on the floor where the dancers had dropped them in the heat of the revel. And there, on the spotted damask cloth of a long table that had served for part of the supper, in all the inglorious dishonour of death, they laid the bloodstained corpse of him who not twenty-four

hours previous had been the master of the feast, and the darling of his poor widowed mother's heart.

It was long before Falkener could leave that ghastly scene to return to the anxieties of his own home; for everything was in the wildest confusion, and the poor lady, passing out of one fit of fainting and hysterics into another, was incapable of giving any orders; while the servants, suddenly aroused from the misty memories of their sottish condition, were too stupid or too stunned to be of much use. Falkener had to see to everything, and second or carry out all the suggestions of Johnstone's poor sister. Nor was this all; for as Mrs. Johnstone began to realise the terrible occurrence, came strings of painful questions as to the how and the why; which all had to be answered, with what truth he dared speak, and with what patience he could command. Then, alas! the flood-gates of abuse were opened upon the unhappy though comparatively innocent cause of all this misery. No name was bad enough for

the bold girl who had won her dear son's heart, and then scorned him. Falkener in vain endeavoured to suggest some consideration for the object of so much affection on the part of the dead man, and ventured to tell how his very last injunction had been that his beautiful seal-ring should be given to her. But this only added fuel to the flame. Adelaide was a witch, and had bewitched her dear Willy, and burning was too good for her.

Nor did poor Sarah, whose many-reckoned maiden years had left her a little sour on the subject of younger and more beautiful women, spare the unhappy object of her mother's invectives. It was terrible to stand in that ghastly scene of faded festivity and violent death, and hear the bitter ravings of these two vindictive women, as though there were no God in heaven, and no mercy on earth; and yet Falkener dared not openly take Adelaide's part, or hardly even plead her cause. For a moment he attempted to do so, but he was instantly si-

lenced by finding that he only turned the poisoned arrows on himself. Another word, and the wretched mother would have lashed out against him. He had been noticed gazing after the vile and wicked hussy; and altogether he found the only safe course was to allow Mrs. Johnstone to take her own unmitigated view of the case, until her lamentations had so completely exhausted her that she was borne unresistingly away by her maids, and he was left at liberty to give what orders were necessary for covering up the sad spectacle in the rapid grave which such hot climates demand; so that, by the close of that same day whose early morn had seen poor Johnstone so full of life, and of a sincere and honourable affection, the few friends that could hurriedly be got together were standing round an open grave, and the coffin was lowered in silence as the sun sank suddenly beneath the brow of the hill, leaving the land in darkness, unmitigated by the sweet pensive twilight of our northern climes.

Mr. Snowden had attended the funeral, quite unconscious of the bad odour in which his beautiful daughter's name was held in that household; and afterwards he had expressed his desire of immediately paying a visit of condolence to the bereaved mother.

Falkener hardly knew how to act. He was the last person who could undertake to explain to Mr. Snowden the real state of the case. The words would choke him as he tried to convey a shadow even of blame of Adelaide. And yet it was essential he should not enter that house and meet with the reception which inevitably awaited him. Mr. Price, the surgeon, was of course also present, and necessarily somewhat acquainted with the circumstances. Falkener addressed himself to him, entreating him so far to awaken Mr. Snowden to the feeling against his daughter, as to prevent any further annoyance.

Words would fail to express Mr. Snowden's astonishment and rage. He had probably never in his life felt so kindly to any people as he had

done to the whole family of the Johnstones. He had intended to confer on them the greatest boon he could command—nothing less than the hand and fortune of his beautiful Adelaide. In compassionating Mrs. Johnstone on the death of her son, he had been fully persuaded that the loss this entailed of Adelaide herself, as a member of the family in future times, was quite one of the sharpest of the many pangs; and now to find that Adelaide was actually vilified by these people whom he had brought himself to believe alone worthy of her, created a revulsion of feeling that turned his heart to gall. Less than one hour sufficed to extract the last drop of human kindness from his poor outraged feelings. He had been thrown back on the worst parts of his character just at the moment when he had been most full of such generosity as he might be capable of; and the shock was too much for his invalid virtue. That one hour did him morally more harm than whole years of his past life, with their many errors, had done; and Joe Snowden returned from the grave of poor

Willy Johnstone a harder man; and for the future a harder drinker than he had ever been yet.

CHAPTER VII.

STOLEN WATERS ARE SWEET.

LIKE the breath of a sleeping child the warm earth exhaled its sweet fragrance on the night air. It had struck nine o'clock the evening of that eventful day. Nursie was exercising to the utmost her strange privileges over the master of the house, and had gone uninvited, on one pretence or another, into the room dignified with the name of study, where Mr. Snowden was smoking his evening pipe, and imbibing a milder portion than usual (out of repentance for his recent excesses) of his common beverage.

Nursie, who knew her cue, had begun by standing respectfully at the door, which however she had closed behind her, while she com-

menced some tale connected with household affairs and the other servants. She could be both graphic and picturesque in her language when she chose, and in the present instance she threw all the charm of uneducated mother-wit into her discourse, with the full intention of thereby making herself too amusing to be lightly dismissed.

John Snowden was not an uneducated man, and in his earlier days, before the obscure events which had led to his suddenly quitting the town in England where he had practised so successfully as an attorney, he had passed for a man not unacquainted with the literature of his day, and possessed indeed of an easy and rather brilliant style of his own, which was frequently detected by his admirers in the leading articles of the ——shire *Watchman*, a paper of advanced liberal views, which were those held by Mr. Snowden himself, until he became a large coffee-planter and a wealthy man.

There is nothing like wealth for imparting a Conservative savour to individual politics, or a

seat in the Cabinet for neutralizing a previous revolutionary tendency. The man with empty pockets and no dirty acres must be partially excused for reading the laws of *meum* and *tuum* with a different running commentary from that of the landed gentry and the millionaires.

These earlier habits of reading and composing, however much obscured by the idleness, the money-making, and dissipation of his Jamaica life, had left in John Snowden at least an appreciation of wit and humour in others. He had often been heard to say that Nursie's conversation was as good as a play; and she had not long been standing at the door before she was invited to a chair opposite her master, and to a glass of wine in his company. A casual observer would have remarked that it was rather as a request than a command that the chair and the glass were pressed upon Nursie, and rather as a condescension, granted with a half bashful arrogance, that Nursie's still supple form sank into the seat proposed to her.

John Snowden looked fixedly at her for a

moment. She was an old woman now—not old as we Europeans count age, for Nursie's winters would hardly have blanched a hair on the head of any fair Englishwoman, but old as women count their years in that climate—women with a large draught in their veins of the hot black blood, which circulates like fire through the languid, well-rounded, voluptuous limbs of a race given up to passion and indolence.

Nursie did not return the fixed gaze of her master, but her woman's instinct told her it was there. Perhaps there was a faint blush on her swarthy, rich-toned cheek, and it did not escape his remark. It seemed no strange thing to sit tête-à-tête and drink wine with Mr. Snowden—nay, she rather appeared to take up her position as one used to that, and to something perhaps nearer still. At once she dropt the tone of the servant, and continued her discourse as an equal, making, of course, due allowance for the peculiarities of her phraseology. Nursie felt she was sitting there in her own right—the indisputable right of the woman

who has been loved once, and gave, alas! love in return.

Men can and do forget what they have received, but no woman can forget what she has given. The brand of remorse cannot efface the light touch of love, and the woman of eighty will recollect with a blush or a shudder "the time, the place, the lover's name," of sixty years ago. Whether to loathe or to love still, she remembers on for ever.

It was perhaps strange that, under past circumstances such as this implies, Nursie should so have loved her lawful rival's child. But Mr. Snowden had not long really cared for his troublesome though beautiful Portuguese wife. Her health had given way completely soon after Adelaide's birth. Nursie had been her handmaid, but hated her mistress; and by the time the sad, dreary tale was over, and the grave had closed on the ill-fated creature, Snowden had placed the child in Nursie's arms, and said, "Remember it is mine, and forget that it was hers." She had done so, and long

ago the innocent love for the child had superseded the guilty love for the father.

But we have little to do with the doubtful past of the wily Creole and her English lord. Our path lies to the oleander grove, where the bright starlight of a hot Jamaica night is throwing shadows black as ink across the garden walk, tracing out the spiky leaves of that most beautiful and baneful shrub, the wood of which, if merely used as a skewer for roasting meat, will poison all who eat thereof; while the pale pink and deep rose-coloured blossoms gleamed faintly amid the dusky mass. The infinite and invisible ramifications of insect life were making themselves audible in the still air. The beetles ticked forth their monotonous love-song, like the bass notes of the harmony. The shrill ciccala was chanting the night portion of his seventy-two hours of passionate pleading, at the close of which he is blest, and dies in ecstasy. The spiders clicked their story in quite another tone from the beetles, and so lugubriously that they have earned for them-

selves the name of the death-watch, and make mortals tremble. And the merry crickets chirped of domestic happiness in the tones that have been so dear to ancients and to moderns. The glowworms and the fireflies did better still; they glanced, and beamed, and burned their lives as women do, and it was more eloquent than words. The birds alone were silent; theirs is lawful love, in open daylight, with published banns and consent of parents. The insects are not a pure-minded race, and they carry on their amours much in the same fashion as a large portion of their two-legged superiors and betters are said to do, with all the advantages or disadvantages of darkness, late hours, occasional moonshine, secresy, and general intrigue.

There, standing in the unflickering light of moon and stars, looking in her white dress like a fleck of silver against the dark mysterious background of thick foliage, was Adelaide. Her strained senses were striving to detect and separate from the surrounding buzz of sound

the approaching step of Charles Falkener.

From time to time a large moth, or a beetle on the wing, would rustle past her, and she would fancy it was his hand pushing aside a low branch. Sometimes the clashing of her own pulses sounded like distant footsteps as she listened and waited, panting.

The few hours that had elapsed since last they met had worked a rapid progress in the feelings of the excitable and susceptible girl. The horror of Johnstone's death had intensified her emotions, without leading them away from the groove in which they had begun to flow. A few brief hours, but hours given up to day-dreams, had paled in her treacherous memory the anguish and the remorse of that early morning, while they had heightened in colour the recollection of Charles Falkener's rescuing her from that fatal ball-room, of his kind arm supporting her when she stood trembling by the rock after the terrible duel, of all, in short, which brought him in contact with herself, and made a link between them.

Presently she saw a tall, dense black form cross the moonlight path, and approach her on the shady side. It was he! She stood motionless, with mingled terror and delight.

"Adelaide, is that you?" And in a moment she was beside him, her two hands placed upon his arm, her head bending almost on his shoulder. Falkener feared she was alarmed.

"I thought," she said, in a hoarse whisper, "you would never come."

"Am I so very late? Are you frightened? Will anyone see you?"

"There is no danger. Nursie is with my father, keeping him quiet with one of her long stories. All the servants are in the house. Speak to me, Mr. Falkener. I am so unhappy."

"What shall I tell you, my poor child, that will not make you sadder still? I have gone through an awful day. Your father will have told you all about the funeral. But no words can describe the agony of that poor mother and his sister. I am afraid you will suffer much annoyance, unless something can be done to make

them hold their tongues and keep quiet."

"How can they bring annoyance to me?"

"Simply because they lay the blame of his death on you, though, God knows, most unjustly; and in their despair they say just what they please."

"*I* do not care, Mr. Falkener."

"I am glad you don't. And there is no reason you should. But I thought it right to warn you."

"Thank you. They may say what they please. It is no fault of mine if poor Johnstone loved me. I could not return it, and you know that. I did not wish him dead. But really I had nothing to do with the cause of the duel. Johnstone was drunk, and I was the victim rather than the aggressor. I wonder what Mrs. Johnstone would have said had anyone behaved to Sarah as he did to me? Though I don't suppose there is much fear of that," she added, with a slight nervous laugh. And Charles caught the infection of the laugh.

"You know you are beautiful!"

"Of course I do. And that, too, is not my fault." And she crept a little nearer to him.

"Look, Adelaide, I have the ring the poor fellow left you. I promised him I would see you had it. It was the last thing he asked me before that dreadful duel. It is his dying bequest. May I put it on your finger, as he made me promise?"

The diamond flashed in the moonlight as he held the ring before her. She started from him.

"Are you going to marry me to that dead man's memory, Mr. Falkener? I won't have his ring. Do you want to fix a remorse on me? Take it away! I hate the sight of it!"

"Oh! Adelaide, you must let me give it you. It is for you to wear it or not, as you please. But I gave my word, a promise to a dying man. I cannot keep the ring. I cannot dispose of it otherwise. Take it from me, even if you never look at it again."

"It is very unkind of you to ask me to take it. It will make a barrier between us. It has the

stain of blood on it. You don't know my dress was stained with blood from *your* hand, when you put your arm round me in the wood? Nursie saw it."

"Good heavens! does Nursie know?"

"That does not matter. Nursie is my *âme damnée*. She will never betray me; and she does whatever I tell her. She would have your throat cut, if I told her. She knows I am with you now."

"You would not wish my throat cut, would you?" said Falkener, laughing.

"Yes, I would—it would be better."

"Adelaide, what do you mean?"

"I mean—well, I don't think I can tell you what I mean."

"Is it that you hate me?"

"I am not sure. Perhaps I do."

"Surely you must know when you hate a person?"

"I have had so very little experience in hate or——"

"Or love, Adelaide?"

"Or love, Mr. Falkener. I believe they are very much alike—sisters, in short, with love for the eldest, and hate for the successor."

"But that would mean that, if you hate me now, you had loved me once."

"Sometimes I think they are twins. It is hard to divide them."

"Adelaide, have you ever loved yet?"

"Never till now, Charles."

She was close to him, his arm round her, and he kissed her.

"Darling! how hard it is!"

"Hard indeed," she replied, in a bitter tone, and, with her two hands on his breast, she pushed him from her, and tried to escape from his close embrace.

"Do not leave me."

"I must go now. And you, Mr. Falkener, must go home to her—to your wife."

Falkener's arm dropped from her waist. If the light had permitted her to judge of his face she would have seen that he was ghastly pale.

"You are right; but you are cruel."

"If I am cruel to you, what am I to myself?"

"And the ring, Adelaide?"

"Well, and the ring. I will take nothing from that poor fellow who is dead. If I take it at all, it must be as from you. Put it on my finger yourself. It shall be a pledge, first, that you will never despise me; and, secondly, that you will——"

"Despise you! What can you mean? Do you not know that I adore you?"

"The two things are not always incompatible, Charles, where a man and a woman are concerned. I have no right to love you, who belong by law to another woman. And so you might even come to despise me."

"My beautiful darling, love has all rights and no laws."

"That may be; but the world has laws, and we dare not infringe them."

Even then, as his arm crept round her again, it dashed across his conscience to inquire whether the lovely wild creature before him ignored all

divine laws! He was dazzled, but he was also shocked; and it seemed to him as if the pale eyes of the sick wife at home, with the unborn babe in her bosom, looked out upon him from the dark oleander trees. He took her unresisting hand—the right hand—and pressing the ring on the third finger, kissed it, saying, "That is my pledge, that I must always adore you as I do now, come what may. All else is a hideous dream."

He caught her to his heart, kissed her passionately, and darted away into the deep shadow. She listened to his retreating steps till all was silent, save the busy hum of the warm night, instinct with life. Warm as it was, a cold shiver crept through her limbs as she felt herself alone, that ring glistening on her hand, those words still ringing in her brain.

She turned slowly to go home, and for the first time she felt frightened. The moonlight looked ghastly; the great trees glowered upon her; the branches stuck out like black arms to

catch her; the deep shadows yawned before her like traps and pitfalls. She looked up from the menacing aspect of the earth and landscape to the bright heavens above; but the stars looked cold and cruelly stern. The moon had an uncompromising fixedness of gaze, that struck her with awe. What had happened to change the very face of nature in so brief a space? Had her guardian angel forsaken her? She tried to quicken her steps, but the sound made her fancy that other steps were following her. She forced herself to walk slower, that she might dispel the illusion; but she felt as if some unseen force were pushing her on.

Just as she came to the bend of the walk which led back to the house, she heard one of the negroes lounging about near the back premises. At first it was almost a relief to her to catch the sound of a living human voice; but when she recognised that of Long Jack, she clenched her hand with rage, and thought a thought as much the equivalent of a curse as an unspoken thought can be. There was a refrain

to Jack's song, and this was the burden of it :—

" The little stars blinked in the big blue sky,
And each had a thought, and each had an eye ;
The little stars thought it a very great sin,
The little stars saw the devils all grin ;
They wrote the story in letters of gold,
That cannot grow pale, and never grow old,
And somebody whispered it down below,
Where all such sinners must go, you know,
You know."

Perhaps a vague sense of the meaning floated through her brain, though at the time she was unconscious of it. She heard the sound; she did not realise that she also heard the coarse, ghastly words. But years after, up to the end of life, whenever Adelaide found herself in the moonlight and alone, some impression of a song—some vague memory of a horrid jingle of words—would flit across her, and make her shudder.

Adelaide re-entered the house again, with the conviction that, for the second time in the twenty-four hours, Long Jack had dodged her steps, and knew all.

From that day Adelaide's life became a mingled tissue of deep-rooted, blind, intoxicating emotion and sudden spasms of agony and terror. It was not remorse. There is very little remorse possible in the early stages of passion. Let the whole world perish so but the lovers may meet! There is nothing so selfish, nothing so cruel, as passion, misnamed love. It sees nothing outside itself; it confuses earth, heaven, and hell in the glare of its own bewildering light; and the two beings who would go through the most terrible tortures each for the other, would see the whole outer world perish without a pang. But terror she did feel lest they should be discovered, and agony lest they should be parted.

Often days passed by, and they could not meet on any pretence whatever. Long Jack did not seem to think it worth while to continue his watches in the oleander grove. Probably he knew enough to surmise the rest, and to be quietly convinced it was going on. If

ever he meant to make use of his information, the hour was not come yet.

The white waxen flowers of the stephanotis gleamed no more in Adelaide's thick dark tresses. She was one of those beings who, for good or evil, throw warmth and colour into every detail of their life. Indolent as she was, her very nonchalance had a poetry about it that gave it charm. Her lightest act had meaning in it. Not always a good, innocent meaning, but still one full of herself, of her own character, of her very essence. The rose-coloured, beautiful oleanders had taken the place of the pale favourite of earlier days. She wore them constantly, and knew and owned that her whole soul was steeped in a bright, delicious poison, like the flowers in her hair.

Meanwhile John Snowden became completely puzzled by the changed demeanour of his daughter. There were no more storms of passion, no more long days of sulks. Sometimes she was very silent, and seemed pensive, if not

sad. At others she was like a lark on the wing, and caroled as loudly and as sweetly. At her father's not unfrequent request she would stand up before him, slightly leaning her graceful figure against the nearest support within reach, sometimes against the window or the wall; fold her beautiful arms across her bosom, throw back her small richly-crowned head, and pour forth from between those full crimson lips and glittering teeth a volume of rich melody that took you captive, the notes gurgling up from the full marble throat without an effort. The repose of form was perfect and unutterable; and yet what expression, what passion, and what a dangerous light from beneath those thickly-fringed eyelids, whose lashes made a long black shadow at the corners, and arched above like the folds of a velvet curtain.

Her father saw the diamond ring she always wore, and supposed it had some connection with poor Johnstone. But who would dare to question Adelaide? Certainly not her father. She refused to go anywhere out into society;

and he imagined this also might be connected with the fatal result of the duel.

The mother of the unfortunate man, and still more his maiden sister, spared no pains to wreak their vengeance on Adelaide, and exhibit their animosity. Anonymous letters reached Mr. Snowden, throwing out dark hints, and paragraphs with blanks instead of names appeared in the local papers, full of inuendos well understood by the unfortunate girl herself, but not so obvious to her father. She would have felt the whole thing cruelly, had she had space left in her heart to feel anything. But she took all to Charles Falkener. A word from him consoled her. If *he* did not care what people said, why should she? Her father sometimes imagined her fits of sadness had reference to young Mr. Standing. But as he was resolved that never could be a match, he thought it wiser not to inquire, but to leave time to do its work.

Mr. Standing never came to the house, or, if he did, never attempted to see Adelaide. He

left Jamaica for a time and returned to England. Mr. Snowden wondered whether by any possibility it might be more on her side than on his; whether that beautiful creature could love in vain. But the real truth never forced itself upon him, and the result was that Charles Falkener, being the nearest neighbour, and having taken to making himself very agreeable and useful to Mr. Snowden, was often asked, in a casual way, to stop for dinner; and frequently, on one excuse or another, would come up to the house to speak a word on business to the father, and then find his way to Adelaide's hammock under the cedar-tree, or to her low wicker chair in the verandah.

One evening especially John Snowden had been more than usually cheerful and talkative with his daughter and Falkener, who had been beguiled into stopping to dine. Adelaide was in a mood that puzzled him. Generally so reticent before her father, and always so anxious to stop his excesses, that evening she seemed bent on flattering him, leading him on, and

even from time to time herself filling his glass, if for a few minutes he left it empty. She seemed to avoid meeting Falkener's eyes, and yet her own were full of covered fire. She was dressed in pale green, like some beautiful serpent, and had fastened the oleanders in her hair and amidst the folds of her gown. She wore a diamond locket round her neck, and the rapid flashes of light betrayed her unequal breathing. She was watching her father closely, and seemed engaged on nothing but amusing and exciting him. Her brilliant chatter, her snatches of song, and, above all, the oft-filled glass, were gradually telling on his besotted brain.

She hushed her merry talk as his heavy eyelids began to close. What a dangerous look there was in her magnificent face, as she sat opposite and watched him! Soon there could be no mistaking the condition he was in; his head fell back, and his loud breathing betrayed him intoxicated and asleep.

Adelaide rose slowly from her chair, and, turning one strange, rapid glance on Falkener,

passed through the window into the verandah. What could he do before the panther-like beauty of that wild girl? His brain reeled; he waited a moment to steady himself and collect his senses, and then he followed her.

She sat crouching in her low chair. Whether on purpose, or from the restless disorder of her sudden movements, a long tress of rich hair had escaped from control, and was lying across her arm. Falkener flung himself down on the mat at her feet, and kissed the perfumed curl. Adelaide impatiently snatched it away; their eyes met—his inquiringly, hers with a scowl. She was the first to break silence.

"Charles, what is to become of us? This life is growing impossible to us both. You cannot leave it; it is for me to make my escape."

"What do you mean? Can you suppose if you left I should let you go alone? Escape if you will; but escape with me. Adelaide, will you come?"

He raised himself enough to bring his face on a level with hers, and his breath played upon

her cheek. She pushed him gently from her.

"No, I shall go alone. I have not the courage to commit so great a sin, even for you, my darling. But I *shall* go, for this is killing me."

"Do not madden me, Adelaide. You *cannot* go. Where would you go to? How would you go? If you break from the dreadful toils that surround us it must be with me—not otherwise. Do you imagine I would *let* you go?"

"You could not help yourself; for you would not know it till the ship had sailed. Nursie has money—hordes she has laid by in the many years she has been here; and I have diamonds and jewels I could sell in England. As for my father, he would soon follow me, so that I should not be left to want."

"You are breaking my heart."

"But mine is broken." She rose with a sudden start as she uttered these words like a cry of despair. Her rapid gesture alarmed Falkener—he got up, and flinging his powerful arms round her, held her by force as she turned away, and almost struggled to leave him. She

burst into tears, finding herself so impotent in his grasp, and hid her face on his bosom.

"Oh! my darling, my own darling, trust in me, and wait a while—wait a little longer."

"Wait for what?"

"How can I tell? Surely in time Heaven will take pity on us, and this agony must cease."

"You talk of Heaven pitying us, and you *mean* that *she* may die when your child is born. If I did not so love you, I should scorn you for using the jargon of religion when you have a thought in your heart that amounts to murder. You wish her dead. If you do *not*, you don't love me."

"I am no hypocrite, Adelaide—it might be; and, if it were, I do not pretend to say I should be inconsolable." And he laughed a low, bitter laugh; but Adelaide detected that it was forced. He was less blinded by passion than she was. He was weak, but not so destitute of principle. Had Adelaide had as much sense of right and wrong as came naturally to Falkener, she

would have been capable of heroic virtue. Without it she was ready to fall into any vice, while he would be comparatively moderate in either virtue or vice. Hers was the grander nature; but it was the more fallen of the two. The laugh chilled Adelaide, and made her shudder; a jealous pang shot through her heart. How could she be sure that with such sacred claims upon him he really cared for her? And even if he did, what next? Was it not all despair and anguish and ultimate separation?

But this thought of final separation was what she could not meet; and, after a moment's silence, during which Falkener's eyes were fixed upon her with a look of intense anxiety, and he still held her near him, she raised her eyes to his face, and said,

"I will wait. Something, Charles, which you, I suppose, would call Providence, but which my horrible conviction of what we are both of us (that is, if you love me as you say you do) feeling and thinking, prevents my honouring with such a name, may possibly happen. If not—and if

not soon, we must part; and, in that case, it is for me to go. Oh! Charles, why did you not warn me? I never knew it would come to this. I thought I could be so happy seeing you from time to time, knowing you cared for me. I thought that would suffice to me."

"And it does not, my own darling?"

"Is it enough for *you*, Charles? I loathe every hour that I spend away from you; and I hate any object that calls your attention, or that fills up your time. And now that I have utterly betrayed myself, now that I have sunk very nearly as low as a woman can sink, leave me, lest in my horror that you should despise and hate me, I begin by hating *you*. I always told you there was but a hair's-breadth between the two."

"Darling! darling! you will not hate me! I would give my life for you; and as it is mockery to suppose I can make *her* happy who had the first claim, in a few more months we will, we *must* break away from this nightmare, this false, impossible life, and together we will fly

from the face of all the world, and be alone. Tell me you will, my own Adelaide. Speak one word."

The one word, the word of sin, was spoken in a kiss, and Adelaide had given her consent to the greatest social crime possible to woman. But the lowest depth was not to be in her case. What she would not call Providence, but what, nevertheless, was a divine permission, came between the wretched girl and the fatal consequences of that blind passion.

It is wonderful how, in certain instances, the great Eternal Hand seems to be again and again stretched forth to rescue individual souls from utter ruin; while others slide, almost or quite without a perceptible check, down the inclined plane that ends in the abyss. The one first false step precipitates them at once, and once for all; but others are caught back again and again in their guardian angel's arms, and seem sometimes forcibly constrained to escape the consequences of the sin they courted.

For a considerable period Adelaide had had

a vague hope that Falkener was not really married to the pale, fragile girl who passed as his wife. There always seemed to be some mystery about it; and, as we have already said, Mrs. Falkener was not generally visited. Nobody seemed quite to know where she came from, nor who she was, and her husband appeared singularly disinclined to offer any explanation. But one day, not very long before the conversation we have just described, Adelaide had been resolved to get to the bottom of the question; and when Falkener was lamenting over his unhappy home, and the utter incompatibility of temper and character that existed between him and Annie, Adelaide had boldly asked him if he was really married. His reply satisfied her. There was no hope to look for in that question. He indignantly asked whether she thought he cared so little for her as not to sacrifice an illicit connection for her sake, had he been legally free; and on her explaining her reasons for having supposed he might not be actually married, and repeating to him, who

heard them not for the first time, the various surmises she had heard in the society of Jamaica, he had explained to her all the circumstances. He had come over to Jamaica as a very young man, and had lived with his cousin, whose property near Mr. Snowden's house he had ultimately inherited. The residence they then occupied together was in a distant part of the island, and not far from his cousin's place was a boarding-school of girls—generally speaking, daughters of the less considerable planters.

Charles Falkener had often met the young ladies in the neighbouring fields and woods, when the heat of the day was over; and his attention had been arrested by the peculiar bird-like voice and nimble movements of a tiny, fairy creature, with a profusion of pale yellow hair, and a complexion like a rose-leaf. She looked like an elf, and she had an elfish, weird way of crossing his path, and trying to attract his attention. It was mere childishness on Annie's part, and she was unconscious of harm. But it roused the curiosity of the handsome

young man, who found the society of his cousin Jackson and the duty of overlooking coffee plantations rather dull, and so he resolved to carry it on. It was not difficult to establish a mutual understanding where both parties were equally willing. A few signals from a window led to a few clandestine but essentially innocent meetings in the garden, in which the girl's wit and her elfish ways combined to delude all around her as to the real nature of her proceedings.

Charles Falkener had no idea beyond amusing himself; but he found that such amusement was not always to be had cheap. And before he had got tired of the silly romance of climbing garden walls, and creeping through hedges, he became aware that the giddy school-girl was desperately in love with him. He tried to break it off, but he was surprised at the torrent of eloquent reproaches which were flung at him. Then the rose-leaf began to fade out of the baby face, and the light form grew almost shadowy. Finally, a strange story got abroad of Annie

Stapleton having been with difficulty saved from drowning, and rescued from the river, into which no one knew very well how she had fallen. Falkener was shocked, and also touched; and when the little ghostly face was able once more to appear in the garden by moonlight, it was to make arrangements for flight, and a secret marriage. Falkener left that neighbourhood and went to a distance on some business for his cousin, and the young wife was established not far from his temporary home, in a small cottage alone with an English maidservant, not very much older than herself, named Mary Dilloway.

Then came all the disillusion of this very silly affair. Annie was an orphan, and with no more fortune than had sufficed to provide for her in a respectable middle-class boarding-school. It was a little doubtful who and what her family had been, but ill-natured report was loud in declaring that somewhere within the memory of man some black blood had tainted the race. Annie's fair skin was not necessarily an authentic denial of that possibility. And so, in addi-

tion to her own personal shortcomings in tone and education, Falkener had to bear the accusation of that one unpardonable sin, of having allied himself to the inferior and infinitely despised race of the country. There was very little in poor Annie herself to counteract so serious a drawback as this. It is true that Falkener never believed it, and always to the last asserted he could prove the contrary. But if nobody chose to believe him, it practically came very much to the same thing. Meanwhile the poor girl, who had become a matron whilst she was still almost a child, began to grow feeble and sickly. The bird-like voice grew into a drawl, the pale gold locks were thin and spare, the rose-leaf had given place to the sere and yellow leaf of ill-health. For two long years the clandestine marriage hung as a blight over Charles Falkener's life. Then suddenly his cousin died, and partly in consequence of poor Annie's ceaseless tears and complainings, and chiefly because, his cousin dead, he was less afraid of his father hearing of it until he had made up his mind

himself to break the news to him, Falkener resolved upon taking Annie openly with him to the estate where we have known him, near Mr. Snowden's. But the act came too late to stifle all the gossip of earlier days. A few believed Mrs. Falkener to be really his wife. But then they contended that she was of Negro extraction. The rest doubted on the first count, and were therefore all the more convinced on the second.

Falkener was a weak man where public opinion was concerned. He was not happy with his wife, and he had long ago awoke to the fact that he had made a great mistake. Nothing would ever make him unkind to the poor child he had married; but he was ashamed of her, and he showed it. Annie was aware of it, and with a sad kind of humility bordering on peevishness, she acquiesced in the fact without attempting either denial or remedy. Indeed the latter was, probably, entirely out of her reach.

Adelaide's last hope had died out of her heart when Falkener distinctly assured her of his

marriage, and gave her the fullest particulars. She had allowed the idea that perhaps Annie was not his wife to take strong hold on her imagination, and out of it she built day-dreams which seemed to take the consistency of reality.

We shall see later on how her vitiated fancy returned to the charge; we shall see not only how the "wish is father to the thought," but how the thought grows into a conviction, and that in the face of facts and proofs, and all else that should guide a reasonable being. For if passion clouds the reason, and all the other intellectual as well as moral faculties, we may teach ourselves to believe, with a belief that is not a true conviction, almost anything we strongly desire. We may take our beautiful and glorious faculties, and deliberately mould them into a well-fashioned and distinct insanity. We may cultivate mania, and give ourselves up to strong delusion to believe a lie. There are many degrees of self-deception. The last, and

the most persistent, may and does conduct on to madness. And who shall dare to say the individual is not responsible for such madness? At least he is responsible up to the point where madness began. After that his further responsibility is lost in the ruin he has made of himself. He has commited moral suicide, and left himself no room for repentance. His insanity may or may not be such as to shut him off from the society of his fellows. In most cases it does not; and men and women who are able to manage their own affairs, are nevertheless mad, and responsibly mad, on some one point. It is always a point connected with their own individual personality, wishes, or passions. It is of spontaneous generation; and once generated, it clothes the mind like an overgrowth of unwholesome fungi. They sought it, and they are given up to it. Many a crime grows out of the self-imposed delusion. Many a life has been overshadowed with the upas-like shadow of one false idea—

wilfully false, wantonly false, which we had ourselves hugged and nursed into a monster belief, it being all the while a monstrous and soul-destroying lie.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD ENGLAND AGAIN.

IT seemed strange that John Falkener should continue to live alone in the Manor-house. The neighbours wondered that when his wife was gone he did not recall Charles at once from Jamaica, and associate him in the care of his large property. It had caused extreme grief to Mrs. Falkener that her only child should be allowed to go so far away. Life had been very joyless after his departure, and it was even said the silent pining had done much to shorten her days.

Charles had felt his mother's death very acutely, and perhaps but for that event would

never have contracted that foolish and ill-assorted marriage. When the intelligence reached him he had immediately written to his father a letter which, without saying it in so many words, amounted to a proposition that he should return to England. The proposal had not been warmly received, and Charles's heart had been chilled towards his father by the latter's evident indifference to having his son back again.

Then came the temptation to amuse and distract himself wih Annie, and finally the conclusion we have described in our last chapter. Charles would not have liked to have had so important a secret from his mother; but there was not the same loyalty of feeling towards his father. His chief anxiety was that his father should not prematurely hear of his marriage. He knew that a step of that nature, which brought him neither fortune nor connection, would be very distasteful to Mr. John Falkener. He had set his heart on Charles making a good

and possibly a great marriage. Wealth he had achieved; but family connection was absolutely wanting, and that came next to money in his graduated scale of ambition. Poor Annie, with her dubious family and utter poverty, was sure to be unwelcome at the Manor-house.

But, in spite of John Falkener's wish that his son should raise the family by matrimony, he seemed in no hurry to bring him back to England. The fact was, John Falkener did not want to have a son treading on his heels sooner than he could help. He was jealous of his power and his independence. A son of three and twenty could not be easily put aside or left out in any arrangements connected with the property. And though John Falkener, unlike the old lordly owners of the place, was little likely to injure the property in any way, or commit one act which his heir could apprehend might mar his future prospects, still, if it only amounted to cutting down a tree or planting a hedge, John liked to have nobody's opinion to

consult but his own. He was not a man of keen affections. He was proud of his son—proud of his great personal beauty, and of his aptitude and clear head in all business matters; but it was no necessity to John to have near him some one to love and to live for. He had cared, in a quiet, unimpassioned way, for his wife, and he felt her loss very severely; but it was a selfish sorrow, as it had been a selfish love. It had reference exclusively to his own comfort, and very little to the happiness of the poor wedded slave who expended all her being in his service. He had indeed more than once turned it over in his mind whether he should not marry again, and this time take care to do it in a way to draw closer to himself that class of society to which he felt already allied by wealth, though separated by birth. There were temptations to be found even in his immediate neighbourhood. Lord Barton at Hurstfield Hall had a sister, suited to him in age, good-looking and pleasant, with just a nice

little fortune of forty thousand pounds—more than enough to make many a younger man than John Falkener forget that she had seen her thirty summers.

The Honourable Eleanor Barton had seemed not indisposed to the possible position of mistress of the Moat. Mr. Falkener was frequently invited when there was to be a snug shooting-party, or a large dinner for all the neighbours; and on such occasions Miss Barton was generally particularly well attired, and in the most pleasant humour.

It fell always, by some strange accident or another, to John's share either to take her in to dinner, or to sit on the other side of her during that important ceremony. And a little nod or a scarcely perceptible motion of the hand secured John that place of honour when otherwise it would not naturally have fallen to him. Certainly nothing was wanting on her part to make it evident to John what was expected of him.

At first Lord Barton had comprehended no-

thing of his sister's little game, and had even been so stupid and obtuse on the subject that one day, when Eleanor had in vain been fishing for an invitation to be sent to the Moat, and her brother had given one reason after another against doing so, none of them very important or carrying much weight, the fair Eleanor, who was beginning to count her rapidly passing years with some anxiety, suddenly lost her temper, and turning very red, had burst out with,

"Well, Edward, I will never ask you to invite any friend of mine again, as long as I am in your house."

Lord Barton was standing at that moment with his back to the fire, carefully nursing his coat-tails, and looked down on Eleanor, sunk in a low luxurious arm-chair before him, with a sudden humorously cunning smile illuminating his handsome bronzed face.

"Why, Eleanor, what's in the wind now? My good girl, I ask you a thousand pardons.

I am very stupid about those things, you know, and I never for a moment suspected! Here goes," he added, moving to the writing-table, "I shall tell Falkener to come Monday and stop till Thursday. We are two in the house besides myself. Burrows and Malcolm come down on Tuesday; and I don't mind for once having six guns out, though, you know, I generally limit it to four, besides my own. So now, my dear girl, make all the play you can, and Falkener is not the man I take him for if he does not lower his colours before the batteries I know it is in your power to mount when you choose."

"Would you like it, dear Edward?" asked Eleanor, immediately appeased.

"Of course I should—that is, in many ways. I should be glad to have you as a neighbour when you have got tired of being a guest. It is a fine property. Better, for the matter of that, than my own. I don't like the house. *I* call it gloomy; but that is a matter of taste.

Many people would call our Greek portico and large windows cold and severe. So you have my hearty consent, if you can make it come off."

Eleanor laughed.

"Having given your consent to my taking the estate and the house, won't you tell me what you think of the man himself?"

"Humph!—that's another question. I have nothing to say against Falkener—he is a very proper sort of person. He is not exactly one of us, you know, Eleanor; though there is no reason why he should not be. Of course it will improve him very much if you marry him. He is not at all ill-looking—must have been handsome when he was young. I suppose you don't mind his being a widower, as you are not exactly a chicken yourself?"

"No, I don't mind that, Edward. Do you think he will make a good husband?"

"That depends upon what you call a good husband. He won't flirt with your maid, or

cause you any anxieties with an opera-dancer. You had better keep yonr fortune in your own hands—not for a moment that I mean he would spend it; but so as not to have to go to him for pin-money."

"And his temper, Edward?"

"His temper, my dear, will be more or less improved—not, of course, in general, but in particular—by his marrying a lady with a small, ever so small handle to her name. Even in his night-cap he won't quite forget that you are the Honourable Mrs. Falkener."

"How can you talk such nonsense, Edward?"

"You will find it very sober sense. Falkener is an ambitious man—has been all his life. He will be grateful to you for bringing him ever so remotely into what he considers the charmed circle of the aristocracy. At the same time, you know, Eleanor, nothing can make a real gentleman of Falkener—as you and I are used to consider gentlemen."

"And yet, you know, he has lived with gen-

tlemen all his life, and was Lord Morton's dear friend."

"That is true; but his father was not a gentleman before him; nor, what is of more importance, was his mother a lady. Still, you know, Eleanor, he is as much of a gentleman as many others. He is not vulgar, nor even common; but the perfume of a noble nature, nobly reared, is not there. But he is a good work-a-day man, as times go; and if there should be something wanting in the matter of sympathy between you and your husband, you will have many things to fall back upon in the position which you can make for yourself."

"But would you think him capable of a dishonest action, Edward?"

"Not exactly. He would not cheat at cards; and, I believe, I mighl even venture on buying a horse of him—which, by-the-way, I am thinking of doing at this moment. Whether or not you will find him large-handed and liberal-minded on matters where money is concerned,

is another question; and it is just in those things that I suspect the sow's ear out of which the silk purse can*not* anyhow be produced, will make itself apparent, and that you might miss the instincts of a gentleman. But you, my poor girl, have had your romance in the past, and have borne your sorrow bravely. I think you would be wrong not to take what comes, if it does come, and accept a good home, and a tolerable husband, if you can find them, as in this case, ready at hand."

"I should have liked it to be something more than that, Edward; and I had even got it into my head that I might care for Mr. Falkener. There is something in his reserve, as opposed to my own outspokenness, that attracts me."

"Very good, my dear, very good. I am glad to hear it. I believe contrasts please, particularly between the opposite sexes. And I promise you I will dance at your wedding."

"I wish you would dance at your own, my dear boy. Is that never to be, Edward?"

"I have vowed no vow. Find me a wife, Eleanor, and we will have two weddings instead of one."

The invitation was sent to Mr. Falkener, and accepted. Meanwhile, Eleanor sharpened her weapons, and prepared, in her frank, determined, and yet most innocent way, to charm John Falkener, and bring him to the point.

That evening Mr. Falkener sat solitary by the dining-room fire. The servants were gone; the dessert, so evidently prepared for the masculine rather than the feminine palate—filberts, walnuts, and olives—was pushed aside; the bottle of claret was all but empty, the glass full, and a cigar just lighted. It was not so very long since one of the successful chapters of John Falkener's successful life had closed, as all life's chapters must close, in the dust of death. The marriage he had made because it might so profit him in his ambition, had brought him quite all the happiness he had asked for in

that direction, and far more than he had deserved. He had been blindly loved and blindly obeyed by one of those womanly natures that ask to be allowed to give all, and expect next to nothing in return. Not a penny of his large income had been wasted by that most discreet housewife. His household had been well-ordered, and his table well-appointed. As for his own special creature comforts, the great Llama himself was not more carefully provided for. The idea of being thanked for her devotion and attention never crossed Jane Falkener's mind in its most extravagant flights of imagination. Was it not enough that he deigned to accept, and be satisfied? It sufficed to her, because she had far more of the *besoin d'aimer* in her unselfish nature than of the *besoin d'être aimé.*

There are only three sorts of women. All women are either divided into those two categories, or unite (in a third category) each want, in an equal or nearly equal degree. These

last are the most perfect, and the least happy, because they are the most difficult to accommodate, as things go in our poor world. Where everything is one-sided, a justly-balanced and even-poised character is the one most likely to meet with scant measure, even if it be not starved outright. It is a great thing to be loved, and a greater still to love; but both united in equal degree come too near heaven for poor mortals to enjoy.

Jane Falkener had eminently belonged to the larger and very useful class of good women (for we are only speaking of the good) who require to love, and will submit to be barely tolerated in return. It is of these that the best wives and mothers are made; and while they are so abundant as we verily believe them to be, there is very little hope of mankind becoming less selfish, or more aware that they are selfish.

Now that it was all over, John Falkener was more conscious than he had ever been while it

lasted of the great blessing he had possessed; and at no period of her devoted simple life had so just a tribute been paid to the merits of his wife as now, when he was thinking of replacing her.

One of the many ways in which the selfishness of almost all (had we not better at once say *all?*) human love betrays itself, lies in the fact that it thinks more of the value of the dear object when lost than while living. But in justice to poor human nature it must be allowed that each one carries in himself, and perceives in others, trifles of temper, manner, and habit which, after the first rose-colour of passion has worn off, dull the edge in the charm of daily intercourse, and bring little flaws on the beauty of mutual attachment. They are often so slight as to be scarcely describable; but they play a considerable part in the wear and tear of life, and, like the detritus produced by snow, and rain, and storm on the face of the great mountains, they slowly but perse-

veringly draw deep furrows in the delights of social and family intercourse, which only mutual generosity and forbearance will teach us to overlook. But when once the grave has set its sacred seal on an affection of the past, the grit and crumples are forgotten and effaced, and only the hallowed memory of a great love remains. What a rest it will be to reach a land where no eccentricities, no quirks, no tricks, no small domestic manias, no irksome peculiarities and habits, will mar our intercourse with the great and noble company of saints and angels!

Falkener sat gazing on the hot embers of a wood fire, lighted rather for cheerfulness than for warmth on this evening of an early Autumn day, and pondered over the past, on which the gates of the tomb had closed for ever. It had been his instinct to copy in detail the habits of the class to which he had so long aspired to belong; and one of them being to have themselves painted full length by the fashionable

artist of the day, this had been carried out in Jane Falkener's case.

At the end of the room, opposite to where he sat, hung the picture of his late wife. The artist had dressed her in pale blue, to do full justice to the warm tints of her yellow hair. We know there was little beauty; but it was a sweet feminine face, without the trace of a bad passion, or the dawn of a great intellect. And on the brow sat that calm content with which Heaven had rewarded the simple fidelity of the good woman and the devoted wife. She had been quite satisfied with the place she held in her husband's life and affections. She began by adoring him before he had ever seriously thought of her, and the adoration had been ever on the increase from the moment she belonged to him, till the end of all in this life to her pure womanly heart. She had seen nothing of his faults; she had never questioned his judgment; and she had all but deified his character.

Could it possibly have been suggested to

Jane that her husband's possession of Moreton Moat had not been achieved always and entirely by the most straightforward and honourable performance of his duty to his late master, you would have astonished her more than by gravely asserting that white was black. She lived on in the purest faith, undisturbed by a doubt, caring little for her, or rather his possessions, except so far as they added to his lustre, and threw an additional light upon his merits. And could she have been compelled to answer an inquiry as to how Mr. Falkener became the possessor of his large property, she would in all good faith have assured you that it was through a special dispensation of Providence to reward his exalted virtue. Peace be to those simple ashes! Surely Heaven has some peculiar reward for those dear, illogical, undoubting women who live and die in a false and futile faith which does them such honour!

John Falkener looked across the room at the

portrait, and sighed. He gazed long on the quiet face, as though to see if it frowned upon his thoughts. Could he have consulted her, he believed she would have carried her abnegation of self even to the point of bidding him marry again. She would have believed that it was his heart which demanded another object of affection. It would never have struck her that ambition, or mere animal selfishness, lay at the root of every sentiment in the dry dust-hole she had called a heart. He knew it himself; but still it comforted him and strengthened him to remember she had never found him out. Then came the ready magniloquence with which we dress up our mixed motives, and turn them out on sublime principles. He talked to his own conscience as if he did not know himself; he bepraised her unselfish affection for him, and persuaded himself, as though he wanted persuasion, that in marrying again he should be doing just that which she would wish for him. Nay more, might he not be imparting some

deeper rest, some more reposeful sleep tc departed spirit by taking to himself anc wife, to fill her vacant place? It grew i him the more he thought of it. It was fas coming a positive duty to the dead wife thi should take another. He began to wonde had not seen it in that light before. To be there was not much time lost. How coul for so long have left that dear departed or mourn over his solitude, his diminished forts, his health less cared for, his very di less looked after! He ended by convir himself that the marriage he was desiring exactly what Jane would herself have wi He lent to her ghost an appreciation o ambitions which the dear, simple, living w had never dreamt of. Jane would have glad her successor should be a woman of thought he. She would have felt—no d when living she had felt—that this one was still wanting to make his position comp And now it was, as he hoped, in his pow

make up for her own involuntary deficiency, and to take to his heart and home the sister of a lord.

The cigar gradually passed off into thin and perfumed smoke, and fell in light grey ashes. The bottle of claret was empty; and by this time a second marriage, and especially one with the Honourable Eleanor Barton, was a positive duty to himself, and a necessary libation to the manes of the departed.

Lord Barton's note of invitation had preceded this strain of thought, and given rise to it just before the hour for dinner; and now the conclusion was happily arrived at. The invitation had been instantly accepted; the deductions and conclusion had proceeded and matured with the process of digestion.

Lord Barton, on receiving Falkener's reply, had tossed it into his sister's lap with one of his quiet, sly smiles. Eleanor blushed, for by this time her mind was made up, and she had little doubt of the ultimate result.

In very early life she had had a deep attachment to one more of her own rank than the husband she was now thinking of. He had died a soldier's death in a distant land, not many months before the date at which she had expected him home to fulfil their engagement. Eleanor had suffered acutely; but it was as a brave woman suffers, and without any sentimentality. She grew thinner and paler; but she relaxed in no duty, and she altered no habit. Perhaps she rather intensified those habits, and took longer walks, and rode harder and faster. There were more new flower-beds cut out in the lawn that year, and many more cart-loads of shrubs moved from place to place, to the distraction of the gardener, than had ever been known before at Hurstfield Hall. But the piano remained closed, and the books ordered down from London by Eleanor were few and far between. It mattered little what the weather was, she went out equally in rain or shine. The poor old women in the village were looked

up in all directions, and upon every possible subject. The village school had never been in such force, or the meek, admiring curate so hard worked. Her energy seemed untiring; and nobody knew and nobody guessed, except perhaps in a degree her good-hearted brother, what gnawing pangs were making that brave heart ache so relentlessly, and digging hollows in the bloom of those young cheeks. She carried on her ceaseless energy month after month, year after year, until she had stamped out what was unbearable in her sorrow, and until it had become a life-long habit. Only as time went on it modified in many respects; and if the walking and riding, now become a necessity, were not less, the occupation of books and music became greater.

The result, after many years, was the Eleanor Barton of the time now before us. She was a good, practical, sensible woman. There was an absence of apparent tenderness, and there was no bloom of extreme delicacy. That

[illegible]

[illegible] vanish had she to

retire on her own fortune. A calm, sensible calculation began to take the place of the long-ago lost dream; and some provision for the future which should enable her to retain her present tastes, and only add pleasantly to her social duties, seemed a prudent course to adopt.

There were other aspirants to her hand, but none in so advantageous a position as John Falkener. Moreover, she said truly when she told her brother that his reserve had a charm for her natural outspokenness. It was the old mistake of thinking that the tightly-corked bottle must necessarily be full of some very precious liquor; and, like so many women, she credited the silent, reticent man with all the noble sentiments he did not express.

It was curious, but natural, that two women of such opposite characters should equally have been deluded by the same qualities in the same man. Not that Eleanor Barton had really all the intrinsic merits of Jane Chester. The

power of devotion, the oblivion of self, were far from existing in the same degree in both women. Eleanor's habits of life had contributed to impair the perfect simplicity engendered by Jane's natural position, and maintained by the transparent fidelity of her character. Eleanor was capable of a high-tempered courage that far transcended anything Jane could contemplate. She was more large-minded, more full of aspirations after good and noble things, less minutely absorbed in the details of daily life. But for a pure, right-minded sense of home-duties, and a sweet, forbearing effort to do good to those whom she loved, commend me to Jane Chester, and to the class of homespun women to which she belonged.

The ice having once been broken with her brother on the question of her marriage with Falkener, they held from time to time other conversations on the subject; and Lord Barton was anxious to know what Eleanor's feelings were respecting the grown-up son then in

Jamaica. He remembered him as a beautiful youth when he went out there to join his cousin in the coffee plantation; but beyond having admired his good looks, he knew very little about him, and no rumours of any importance had come across the seas respecting his general character and conduct.

Lord Barton had never thought John Falkener could be a very affectionate father to keep his only child so far away from him; and he knew the prolonged absence was a great grief to Mrs. Falkener. But all this had had no special interest in his eyes, until the idea of his sister's entering the family brought it home to himself. He found Eleanor rather shrinking from the notion of Mr. Falkener's son coming home. She naturally thought she should prefer keeping her husband to herself; and she was still young enough in manners, feelings, and, above all, in appearance, to be a little embarrassed at the notion of a very handsome stepson of four-and-twenty lounging always about the house.

"I don't see that I need say anything about it to Mr. Falkener," said she to her brother one day, when they had fallen on that topic. "It is for him to know what he wishes about his own son, and if he chooses him to stop in Jamaica, I do not suppose it is any business of mine."

"That may be true in one sense, Eleanor; but at the same time I think you ought to take into consideration that, if you never make any move in the matter, Falkener will feel that possibly you wish the awkward grown-up stepson to be kept out of the way. You look more fit to be his wife than the father's, and we might have a case of King Philip and Don Carlos over again."

"At any rate, we won't have him garrotted in his own bedroom. The best thing Charles Falkener could do, so far as I am concerned, would be to marry himself; then his wife and I could be companions, and my big stepson would be disposed of."

"It would be a bad thing for everybody, in all probability, if he brought home a wife from Jamaica. Now you are about to enter the family, I hope they will go on making decent connections, and so get out of the set to which Falkener owes his origin."

"Why, what do you know against them?"

"Nothing; only it is not your set, and your marrying him ought to be the first step out of it."

"His past connections will not make much difference to me. I shall always keep to my own people, and my husband must accept them."

"Which in this case he will be proud to do. Falkener has some instincts which are above his origin, and amongst them is his appreciation of the advantages gained by good blood and good breeding. I am glad of it, for I should not like to have your children, Eleanor, dragged down into another sphere."

"I shall take very good care that does not

happen," looking down with a slight blush, "if ever there should be any occasion to think about the matter at all."

"Well, I hope you will have that emergency to provide for. I think, when a woman does not exactly make a marriage of affection, it is doubly important that she should have children."

"But I do intend it shall be a marriage of affection in the long run. I mean to care for Mr. Falkener, Edward. In short, I mean to love him."

She looked up with a bright blush, and something like a tear in her handsome grey eyes.

"Certainly, my dear, certainly. You are quite right. I hope you may. I have no doubt you will. I think you very wise and sensible about it, and you know you have my full consent and approbation."

Lord Barton's voice was growing husky, and he moved towards the library door as he spoke. The last words were uttered with the handle in

his hand; and, like a true Englishman, he vanished from sight before his good feelings had too much betrayed themselves to comport with the general calm and cool demeanour natural to the Briton.

Eleanor sat meditating some time longer. There passed before her mind visions of the "long ago." The face of the beloved dead was present to her memory; the recollection of a thrill through every nerve produced by one footfall and one voice, which John Falkener's would certainly never produce. She summed up again the *pros* and *cons* of her present intentions, and the *pros* had it. She felt her brother hoped, but did not believe she could love Falkener. But she knew there were depths of quiet, sterling attachment in her nature, of which Lord Barton was not aware; or, more probably, which he felt had so belonged to himself that he did not care to realize the fact that they might pass into the service of another man. Altogether her prospect was a quiet and con-

tented one; and Eleanor had seen enough of life to be very nearly, if not quite, convinced that such prospects generally wear better than those which begin with more brilliant hues.

CHAPTER IX.

PARTRIDGES AND PHEASANTS.

WE have already had an idea given us of the aspect of Hurstfield by the owner himself. Lord Barton had alluded to the Greek portico and the large, severe windows. It was, in fact, one of those well-built, handsome houses, with a huge, square entrance-hall, several very high and generally square rooms, and a grand portico with Ionic pillars, so often seen in our English parks, and so ill-adapted in form and colouring to the cold tints of our English climate. The warm tones of old brick, with the yellow and brown lichens on the stone mullions; the shadows thrown by gables and twisted chimneys, harmonize well with our

changeful sky, and look picturesque in the heavy shrouds of a snow-storm, or the warm glow of a summer sunset. But the straight façade and acute angles that represent a more classical style, seem to call for the intense blue background and glittering sunshine of at least an Italian sky. They give the same sort of shudder to the spectator that a semi-clad nymph, or a totally unclad cupid, produces in an English garden; for they impart the same impression of being out in the cold.

Nevertheless Hurstfield, with its true Saxon name and untrue Greek aspect, was what would be called a fine place. It had breadth and height, and a general appearance of grace and grandeur. It had a fair sprinkling of really good pictures and a larger amount of ancestral likenesses. There stood an Apollo by Flaxman and a Mercury by Cavona, in niches in the hall; while a scantily-dressed Venus rose out of a bank of exotic plants, and feathery ferns in a recess in the drawing-room. There was the yellow drawing-room and the rose

drawing-room, so called according to the colour of their damask silk furniture; and they opened into each other. At one end was Miss Barton's boudoir, fitted up in blue and gold; and at the other the large capacious library, with a billiard-table in an alcove at the further end.

There were endless capabilities for lavish expenditure in a house of these dimensions; but Lord Barton was not a spendthrift. He had been content with the pictures and the plate as his father had left them to him; and they were sufficient for his position and his fortune. Year by year he added something to the contents of the library; for, as English lords go, he was a reading man.

The care of the house had for many years fallen to Eleanor Barton, as regards all the minor questions of new carpets and fresh *cré-tonnes*. And she had done it well, with much refinement and something of artistic taste.

The neighbours were always regretting that Lord Barton did not marry, and were more or less possessed with the idea that it was his sis-

ter's excellent housekeeping and agreeable companionship which precluded his finding a wife necessary. And yet they all agreed that so charming and so loveable a man ought to belong to somebody. It was a pity so good a husband as he would have made should be wasted in bachelorship; and great was the gossip and numerous the speculations as to whether he would think better of it, and take a wife when Miss Barton should leave her brother's house.

But Lord Barton's large and lofty cupboards contained their skeleton, as the less carefully dusted and gloomier abodes of other anatomical specimens may do. There had been a love in early youth, which had begun when marriage had been possible with the dear object. A temporary separation, and a misunderstanding as to his intentions, had prevented it then; and the lady had given herself to another.

The embers of that youthful passion were now covered by the white ashes of revolving years. But they were not dead. The warmth, or rather the impetuosity of passion had died

out, as it should do in every high-principled mind, with the barrier that had arisen. But the calm, sad, silent worship went on to the last. The lady had made an unhappy marriage, and she and her husband lived apart; she in great solitude, he no one knew or much cared how. The old friends wrote sometimes, and met still more rarely. No word of the past was ever uttered. Neither ever explained, nor ever remonstrated. The inevitable must always be sacred. Each knew what the other felt and thought, but silence was their only eloquence. The grave alone would loosen those tongues and unclose those lips. The vault of heaven would alone give echo to that unspoken love-story. Upon how many such attachments will Eternity set its consecrating seal!

Lord Barton had no scruples in remaining single, as concerned the property and title he inherited from his father. His younger brother Harry had married an amiable, pleasing girl of good connections, and they had one child, a fine dark-eyed, golden-haired little fellow of two

years old. They were now in the house, where indeed they spent the larger portion of their time. As a younger son Mr. Harry Barton's fortune was small. His wife had brought him enough to double it, and they had a small house in London, but no place in the country. Harry Barton had all the expensive tastes incident to his birth and education. He had studied for the law. He owned the inevitable chambers of his profession, but he was rarely burdened with a brief. No doubt he might have had more of those profitable burdens had he done something to obtain them; but Mr. Barton was neither studious nor ambitious, and except when some friend of the family thought it a kindness, and almost a duty, to put their case into his hands, he never went out of his way, or more properly (as he was virtually a barrister), he never went *in* his way to gain employment. Lord Barton always said his brother would have made an eminent lawyer had he taken the trouble to become one. And no doubt this was true. But it was exactly the trouble that Mr. Harry

did not relish. And save from an occasional hint, dropped from time to time during the shooting season, of how beautiful the chrysanthemums were looking from his windows at the Temple, no one need have guessed that he had anything to do with those august premises.

Mr. Barton was very unlike his elder brother. He had a less keen sense of humour, but he had a more sparkling style of conversation. His spirits were high, and his powers of enjoyment complete. He was proud of his wife, proud of his baby, and proud of himself. He took things easily on the whole, even when the ever-returning weekly bills were too high for his income. But it may be doubted whether he would have taken easily his brother's marrying. He would have behaved like a gentleman about it, as he would have done about everything; but he would have been greatly cut up at the blow to his own prospects; for unquestionably those prospects were at the bottom of much of the pleasant hilarity with which Harry Barton floated with the ebb and tide of daily life

Every man has a secret spring in him. Some have more than one. Harry Barton's secret spring was admiration of his elder brother while living, and the probability of succeeding him when dead.

There is no calculating the fund of consolation this was to him, when from time to time those tiresome weekly bills were certainly too high. He would not have hastened the event which would enable him to pay off old scores by a single day, for his affection for his brother was as great as his admiration. But still it was undeniably a comfort to reflect—quite silently down in the bottom of his soul, hardly ever whispered even to Agnes, the wife of his bosom—that the day would come when, whatever outstanding debts he might have (and they were not large) would easily be paid off when he came into the property; and would then only appear the very natural little excesses, not so much of a younger son as of an heir-presumptive.

Mrs. Barton was exactly suited to her hus-

band. She had even spirits and a sweet temper, was always ready to be amused, and never inclined to grumble. It would have been difficult to find two people with whom life went more pleasantly than with Agnes and Harry. They took things as they came, and made the best of them; and it is noticeable that to such persons circumstances are generally propitious, for it is safer to float with the tide than to stem the torrent. They were without any very deep sense of the responsibility of life, but took an honourable and large view of things in general; not over-scrupulous, but following out the decorous instincts of high breeding and good education; far removed from the supernatural and the heroic, but never running counter to public morality, or gravely compromising the peace and security of domestic sociability.

In the long ages of the world, the pressure of Christianity, combined with the refinements of art and science, has produced an aggregate of this degree and kind of virtuous people. They reach no high standard, but they shock

no proprieties, and they form a good average stratum on which society may safely build, and live, and flourish; waiting until such time as some moral earthquake, some revolution in the thoughts and sentiments of mankind, come to test the stability of individual principle and the integrity of each man's conscience. Heaven avert from us these epochs in the world's history!—or, better still, imbue us with that quality of virtue which alone will withstand the shock.

Miss Barton, and her sister-in-law Agnes, were excellent companions, and got on together capitally. No deep sympathy existed between them—there so seldom does among relations by marriage—but they made very good fair-weather friends, and in any family calamity would have stood by each other with all the tenacity which rightly belongs to families of good birth and high connection. Family pride comes in, as it ought to do, to protect and support family ties; and if there be really "a noble virtue misnamed pride," it is of this

nature. Nevertheless there were circumstances in life in which Miss Barton would sometimes rather her sister-in-law were not present, and the impending courtship of Mr. Falkener was one of them. She would rather have had the house to herself while it was going on. She felt she was mistress there, and was, moreover, neither of an age nor a disposition to require any female chaperonage under the coming ordeal. It would have been easier to have slipped her arm into Falkener's, and strolled out with him on the terrace and down the garden walk, those fair Autumn evenings, if Agnes had not been sitting on the window-sill watching the proceeding. A certain amount of what the world has desecrated by the name of spooning was inevitable, and not altogether unpleasant. But Eleanor had been too many years the staid though gay and handsome mistress of her brother's house, to care to appear in the character of a love-lorn maiden.

However, having made up her mind it was the right, and proper, and sensible thing to do,

she was not going to do it by halves. Agnes might sit on the low window-sill and smile as much as she pleased; John and Eleanor would still take their walk. Only a compromise should be effected, by begging Agnes to come too, as soon as the other gentleman had left the dining-room.

The dinner had passed off as usual, with John Falkener on one side of Eleanor, though Sir William Drake in his right as a Baronet had necessarily taken her in to dinner. She had talked to him in a lower voice than to Sir William, as if giving him to understand that though courtesy compelled her to pay attention to the Baronet, friendship and intimacy belonged to him. She had not said much, though that little related to himself, his interests, his improvements at home, his plans for the Winter. With Sir William, on the contrary, she had discussed the opera, criticised the last novel, and communicated to him the latest gossip. John might have felt a little behindhand on these topics, and have fancied himself slightly in-

ferior in consequence; but no such fear could trouble him when in another and a lower, softer tone of voice, she turned to ask about the building of his last group of model cottages, and showed herself so well acquainted with the advantages of stone pig-styes, and the advisability of the wood-house being close to the wash-house; while a narrow stone path up the garden to the door was so preferable to gravel, which the children carried into the house on their muddy boots, to the despair of the scouring, sweeping mother. She knew so much about it; she was so practical and so sensible. She compared notes between the cost of John's cottages and those her brother had erected; and the preference was given to the former. She had told her brother so, and had urged his going to see Mr. Falkener's. He had promised to do so with her one of these days; would Mr Falkener allow them?

Not far off sat Colonel Malcolm of the 10th Hussars. He saw the little game. A practical man was Colonel Malcolm; and he had lately

reflected much on the blessings of domestic life, and the still greater blessings of patching up a rather broken fortune by seeking an alliance with Lord Barton's handsome sister. Colonel Malcolm munched his grey moustache, and looked abstracted. Captain Burrows of the Royal Navy, who was sitting near Mr. Pibrock, the author of that wonderfully sensational novel, entitled "What was it for?" and who had run down for a few days to carry a gun, which he never by any accident let off with any other result than that of endangering the life of some one of the featherless two-legged animals in his vicinity, amused himself and his neighbour with taking notes mentally, and subsequently talking it over, as they wandered out into the open, cigar in hand.

"Malcolm," said Captain Burrows, "is looking glum to-night. Did you see how that good-looking farmer fellow wiped his eye to-day when he aimed at a pheasant?"

"I suspect he is likely to wipe his eye in the pursuit of other and higher game as well."

"You mean Miss Barton? By Jove! he'll be a lucky fellow. She is a fine girl; and they say she has a hatful of money."

"I cannot understand," responded Pibrock, "her taking to a fellow like that."

"Oh! I assure you Falkener is a very good fellow. I have known him, on and off by meeting him here, for some years. His first wife was not exactly a lady—a very good sort of person, I believe—companion to Lady Morton. I often wonder how he managed to wriggle himself into all that fine property."

"My dear fellow, it's muscle and sinew does everything now." (Mr. Pibrock was slightly deficient in both.) "Muscular Christianity is the only one I believe in. And our civilization and social standards necessarily take their ground on our religion. They, too, are therefore based on muscle and sinew."

"I suppose you mean to the exclusion of blood?"

"Certainly. To the exclusion of all that you mean generally by that term. Blood will never

rule in the present day. It is depreciating hourly. I am not an old man,"—(here Mr. Pibrock passed an attenuated hand through some long grizzled locks)—"and I wait till Brain shall be in the ascendant."

"I wonder whether that will be in my time."

"I should hardly think so," said Pibrock, with a sinister smile which was entirely lost on the honest sailor.

"Well, I should have thought that a woman like Miss Barton would have cared for blood more than—'bone and sinew,' didn't you say? He's a well-built fellow, and has a capital hunting-seat. He rides seventeen stone, so I've heard him say; and his horses must cost him a pretty penny. He went down to Melton the winter after his wife died and the winter after that, I suppose he wanted to ride it off; and now he's going to complete the cure with Miss Barton."

Pibrock looked infinitely disgusted. Not many months ago the lady had talked with him by the hour about "What was it for?"

and had told him how she had lain awake after the murder of the gambler by his friend's valet, and how she had wept when the wrong cousin was found dead in her bed. Pibrock had written a couple of stanzas on that sleepless night and those tears; and now, on pretence of partridges and pheasants, he had come down to Hurstfield, with a strong feeling that his literary career would increase in glory and decrease in labour, if the fair and aristocratic Eleanor would consent to become the Honourable Mrs. Pibrock, and preside over the laburnum-shaded lawns of Mansfield Lodge, Putney. But, alas! the era when brain shall be lord of all had not yet dawned; and Pibrock had the mortification of finding that something, which he chose to call muscle, was to carry the day. Actually Falkener, who had never written a line that belonged to literature, was to have the prize; and as he ruminated over his mortification, he felt that even the marine dunderhead at his side might perhaps have had as good a chance as himself with the woman on whom he

had wasted two of the most epigrammatic stanzas he had ever penned.

Agnes had taken her husband's arm, and was pacing the terrace with him. Neither alluded to Eleanor and Falkener, but both saw what was going on. Lord Barton's arm-chair had been moved to outside the open window, and another was occupied by Sir William Drake. An empty one stood on his left hand; and presently Eleanor and Falkener approached, and the former slipped silently into the chair, leaving Falkener on the terrace path.

"Take a cigar, Falkener?" said Lord Barton, feeling for the awkwardness of the moment.

The offer was accepted, and behind the curtain of smoke John concealed any slight bashfulness he may have experienced; and the three men chatted together, while Eleanor sat silent.

"It's a pity you can't join us smoking," said Lord Barton, by way of making a break for his sister to join in.

"For shame, Edward, to hint at such a thing!"

"Did you ever try, Miss Barton?" asked Falkener.

"That's hardly a fair question. I am not fond of confessing."

"Then I'll confess for her," broke in Lord Barton. "All I know is this. Not so very long ago I brought some small, yellow-tinted things, full of the sweetest Latakia mortal ever tasted. And I should probably never have found out what became of them if I had not one day burst in the most unmannerly way into my sister's dressing-room, full of an important piece of news, which dropped from my lips as I saw one of the cigarettes drop from hers."

"Are you very much shocked, Mr. Falkener?' said Eleanor, looking up archly.

"No. A handsome woman, and a lady, may do anything gracefully. All depends upon who does it, and how it is done."

"Something also upon the when and the where it is done, I think. I have smoked some-

times alone with my brother, and once or twice alone in my own room, *en cachette*, to cure a nervous headache."

"Those are privileged moments," said Falkener, rather sententiously. He would have liked to say more, and hinted at other possible privileged moments, but he did not know how. Eleanor read what was passing in his mind, and said to herself,

"I wonder if he supposes I will ever smoke with him, even as his wife?"

No, there would never be quite the *laisser-aller*, the safe quiet freedom with the plebeian husband that there had been at her own home, with her own kith and kin. Muscle and sinew were not yet "the lord of all."

Henry and Agnes always had their own private sitting-room at Hurstfield, for Lord Barton wished his brother to feel quite at home when they paid their visits of weeks and months at his house. Breakfast was over. Henry had received the rare and onerous duty involved in a little law business, and consequently as his

brother preferred going out with fewer guns, had given up shooting for that morning. Agnes was writing one of her long, chatty, charming letters of gossip which she looked upon as part of her daily social duties, and Henry was turning over the rattling, creaking pages of his brief opposite her. Presently he looked up and said,

"I say, Agnes, what is going on between Eleanor and Falkener? What does it mean?"

"Well, I'm not sure, but I think it means something serious. I never saw Eleanor look so grave over a thing of that kind before. She generally carries it all off with a little bantering and laughter. But this is quite another thing, and I begin to suspect it is all sober earnest."

"Humph! that's a bad look-out for us!"

"Why? How does it affect us?"

"Not *us*, but our younger children, if we have any. Don't you remember my telling you Eleanor's fortune would come ultimately to our younger children, if she died unmarried?"

"Which I never thought she would do, Henry. I am sure I should be very glad. Not

that I particularly like Mr. Falkener. Besides, there are no younger children yet, you provident fellow; and if there should be you'll be able to provide for them out of the estate, one of these days."

"You seem to forget that Edward may marry—and I am sure I think he ought. And that will make all the difference, if Eleanor marries too. I wonder, if she marries, if she will have any children of her own."

"You mean that if she does not she might still leave her money to ours?"

"Yes, that is what I mean; but there is no way of making it certain. She has absolute power to do what she will with her money."

"I can't suppose if she has no children she would leave away her fortune from her family. It would be madness to leave it to Mr. Falkener, who has already more than he can know how to spend; and it would be wicked to leave it to his grown-up son by his first wife, with whom she can have nothing to do."

"I suppose it will all come right somehow,"

answered Henry, "if she does do it. We cannot help ourselves."

"I don't agree with you there, Henry. I think if Eleanor marries your brother would be bound to advise her what to do with her money. It is not as if she were marrying a poor man."

"It is a very delicate thing to advise anyone what to do with their money; and I am sure Barton would not do it."

"I think he might hint it."

"Barton is the last man to hint anything. I am sure I wish Eleanor all the good luck in the world. She has always made things very pleasant for us here, and it might have been otherwise. I should like her to marry, and to make a good marriage; and Falkener is very rich, and can leave her a handsome dower. Nevertheless, I agree with my father, who used to say, 'Blessed are the old maids; they do good while they live, go to heaven when they die, and all their money comes back to the family.'"

When all is said and done, is it not money that is "the lord of all?"

The courtship went on, as such courtships may do. The rocks and the shallows, the cataracts and whirlpools, were all wanting, because the "true love" was wanting. But we must not be hard upon our heroine. Romance does not come every day of the year; and when it has been and gone, it rarely can, and still more rarely ought to come again. Love-dreams are very beautiful; but there are other things with more base to them. There are substances less graceful than the fleeting shadows, but with the advantage of being substances. Prudence is a great virtue; patience is a greater still. Household bread is good fare, and better food than mere wedding cake. There is surely something pathetic in the two aged lovers whose united years make up a hundred and twenty, seeking a supreme sanction for sitting in the chimney-corner together, safe from the world's snarling censure, and strong in each other's affection. "Lord, keep my memory

green!" And if the memory, how much more the heart!

But we are imagining an extreme case, and must not forget that if the courtship of Eleanor and John was marked by prudence, it was not without the charm that thirty Summers had ripened, and not destroyed, in the handsome, vigorous woman; while, if John's life began to count by Winters, they were those of bright, sun-illumined frost—windless and calm, clear and health-breathing.

The following day John did not join the shooting-party, and Colonel Malcolm had all his rightful pheasants to his own gun. But he knew he had lost his Bird of Paradise for ever. Eleanor had wished for a nearer inspection of those model cottages; she was to ride over and see them with their proud proprietor, and had taken a little note-book with ivory tablets, on which to write down on the spot those particular improvements she had been so anxious Lord Barton should make in his buildings.

They came home late to luncheon. Agnes

and Mr. Pibrock had had a tête-à-tête, for the latter was weary of trying to put salt on the birds' tails; shooting partridges and pheasants being much the same thing to him as that proverbially impossible feat. He had gone to the library, to look on the top shelves at the long-forgotten novels of a past generation, for the skeleton of a plot which he might then cover with modern flesh and blood, and so spare himself some needless expenditure of creative power. Agnes had gone back to her social duties in the way of letter-writing; and when the belated lovers had finished their half-cold luncheon they had wandered into the billiard-room, and began knocking the balls about; while a brisk, sunny Autumn shower rendered all idea of further out-of-door exercise impossible.

When one person means to say a thing, and the other person means it to be said, conversation ought not to be very difficult. Nevertheless there seems ever to be all sorts of impediments in the way of getting out the most

ordinary proposal of marriage. Is it a merciful dispensation of Providence that what may be so fatal, should also be so awkward? Whether or not, it came out at last. Neither quite remembered how, but so it was. The words were spoken; and the shower ceased. John seized his hat—the man's refuge, his panoply, his providence, his support—the one only thing he never forgets—and went to walk off his excitement in the park. Eleanor tripped up to her room, to take off her riding-habit, and lie in white muslin, lace, and ribbon on the sofa, and reflect till dressing-time.

Lord Barton had an instinct of what had happened, and knocked at the door in his wet shooting-coat to ascertain the fact.

"It is done, dear Edward; and John will speak to you to-night."

He squeezed her hand affectionately in his cold wet palm.

"All right, old girl. God bless you! I hope it will answer."

"I hope so; and I think so. I really did not

know he cared so much for me as I now see he does."

Lord Barton's eyes glistened. He loved his sister dearly. He fully understood and appreciated her large, sensible, half-manly nature, with the true instincts of her woman's heart to correct what might otherwise have led to overmuch freedom and some hardness. He would sadly miss her companionship. She had been as much as a younger brother to him, and better. And he was thankful that if he was to lose her the man who married her should know the full worth of his treasure.

John had been even more eloquent than Eleanor had expected. The eloquence had told well. She had believed thoroughly, and was almost surprised he cared for her so much. And so love's brief ditty did, as it always does, persuade the most wary, and seemed like a quite new and most genuine revelation, direct from Heaven. Oh! most dear and blessed delusion, what would life be without you?

There was no sitting together that night at

dinner. By common consent they kept apart. The consequence was that the servants' hall and the housekeeper's room were in a state of consternation and disappointment for all that night, fearing that what they had seen meant nothing after all.

John and Lord Barton were somehow missing for a quarter of an hour in the course of the evening. The latter returned to the company looking very merry, and the former rather sheepish. Eleanor looked unheedingly at them both, and seemed to see neither, with most artful composure. Everybody behaved admirably. And then, ten minutes after all had retired, the sisters-in-law met in their dressing-gowns, and sat over the fire,—Eleanor being the one to visit Agnes. Harry came too, and it was one o'clock in the morning before the three separated, warmly embracing, and—we will do them the justice to state—neither husband nor wife thinking of possible younger children, nor of the old maids who go to heaven, and leave their fortunes to come back to the family.

John vanished to London early the next day, and Eleanor wrote two dozen letters to as many intimate friends. By the last train a trusted servant came from Mr. Falkener, with a large flat case. It held, in crimson velvet, three thousand pounds worth of diamonds. The first Mrs. Falkener had no diamonds. There was also a letter, and among other things the writer told her was, that he had already settled with ——, the painter most in repute at that time, for having a full-length portrait painted of her, as soon as he could call her his very own. It was necessary to make the agreement at once, as ——'s time was so taken up with fashionable sitters.

The same artist had painted the first Mrs. Falkener some years previous. When John returned home the picture was taken down from its place in the dining-room, where we saw it at the beginning of this chapter, and was hung on the large staircase, amongst we cannot say the ancestors, for there were none of the Falkener family, but other pictures of less personal

interest. Meanwhile the space on the dining-room wall yawned for the portrait of the new lady of the house. *Sic transit!*

CHAPTER X.

PUT AWAY THE PAST.

WHEN a young man marries and settles in life (or a young woman either), he does it as one of the natural, evident, almost inevitable acts that belong to the usual course of human existence. Of course it is a great event, perhaps even a grand event, though that will depend upon whether he belongs to the humbler classes, or to the upper ten thousand. But to all ranks and classes it is the grand turning-point in a life. Still it is a far more complicated business when it is an act perpetrated by a man over forty—nay, fully fifty, with a long past trailing behind him; one buried wife, and a living, grown-up son. Few can enter on the

event without some of those secret preparations which are generally so painful, and, alas! often so very secret. There is probably an escritoire or a despatch-box that has to be opened and well searched before men or women, unless they be very young, can stand at the altar and promise each other "to have and to hold from this day forward." There may be carefully-tied-up packets, bound with no official red tape, which it is better to untie, and commit to the hungry flames. There may be less telling tokens, or rather less explicit tokens, which perhaps, as they point so vaguely to the past, may, for dear memory's sake, be allowed to lie hidden. A tell-tale ring, inscribed "*Malgré tout*," may contain a whole unwritten history. But then, being unwritten, it may be glossed over. But woe betide the little folded slip of silver paper inscribed "Only a woman's hair." That must go—that must perish in the flames, and be hidden for ever out of sight, if possible blotted out of memory, till—O fatal thought!—its story shall be chaunted forth to a listening

world, with the terrible accompaniment of the last trumpet's blast.

John Falkener was a fortunate man. His past had been seamed with no histories. No heart-weaknesses, no sowing of wild oats, no pathetic mysteries, rose before his unseared conscience. A youthful folly had never crossed the lines of his secure, rational, sensible, money-making life. No child could pretend to call him father, save the respectable well-educated young gentleman whom we have left in Jamaica. If he had his secrets they had never been committed to paper; they were written on no tablets but those of his own heart. It is true we have spoken harshly of his being now in possession of his late patron's estate; but who shall bring him to book for that? Those registering angels who keep the awful ledgers up on high, must have some other mode of calculating the value of motives and their consequent actions, than those our grosser minds employ. They gloss over no fractions; they admit of no engrossing. The debtor and

creditor account is submitted to none of our human and worldly "cooking" processes. And perhaps if we could turn over the pages of those terrible folios, we might find that not all the ways and means through which John Falkener had become the prosperous individual we have known him, would read quite so honourably as men believed, or made pretence to believe. But, at any rate, if this were so, no one knew it but John and the Recording Angel; and with them we must leave it until we have the opportunity (unless at that moment we should haply find ourselves too much taken up with listening to our own accounts) of making it all out to the sonorous accompaniment we have already alluded to. Still there were preparations to make, besides the momentous one of removing the late Mrs. Falkener's portrait from the dining-room to the staircase. A few little things had better be consigned to the lumber of the past. And, above all, full justice must be done to the honour of marrying into a noble family, by making provisions for an am-

ple dower, such as would flatter Lord Barton, and impress on Eleanor a full sense of how she was appreciated.

Miss Barton had forty thousand pounds to her own fortune; that should be secured to her and her children, of course. Lord Barton would probably wish it, and John did not want the money himself, therefore there could be no question about it. Moreover, that should be doubled; and, besides that, a pretty little half-cottage residence, called the Grange, and situated on the confines of Mr. Falkener's and Lord Barton's property, should, with its twelve acres of arable land, be made over as the dower-house, should Eleanor survive her husband. The terms proposed by John, in the gratitude of his heart, were so large and liberal that there could be no occasion to speak to Lord Barton and Eleanor about them, before his own lawyer drew up a schedule of the settlements; and from a delicate and generous sentiment on his part, this was done immediately, without any previous reference to Lord Barton, and

then laid before him with a simple request to know if it met with his approval.

Lord Barton did more than simply approve. He was enchanted. And having been requested by Mr. Segrave, John's legal adviser, who arrived with a short note of introduction from his employer, to ask Miss Barton if she wished to make any suggestion, he ran quickly up to his sister's room with the bundle of important documents in his hand.

"Really, Eleanor, Falkener is a regular trump. I had no idea he would come out so magnificent. Just attend to this."

And then the hearty genial man drew a chair beside her, and was about to explain to her all the details proposed by her future husband.

Eleanor was at that moment engaged in the retrospect of the past which we have declared to be inevitable in every case, but which to John's easy conscience had come so lightly. There was something very like a tear in her eye as she gently drew towards her a large

heap of letters, bearing foreign postmarks, and a red circular case evidently containing a miniature. Without paying much attention to Lord Barton's remark, she said—

"Do you think, dear Edward, I ought to burn these?"

There was something pathetic in her voice, and in strange contrast with the cheery tones in which her brother had announced the purport of his visit. But Lord Barton was one of those rare characters whose sympathy is always ready at hand. Most people, men especially, keep their sympathy under lock and key, wrapped up in cotton wool, and only to be got at through a troublesome and lengthy process. The key is usually mislaid; and in unpacking the treasure and laying it out for use, you are choked with the fluff of the light material in which your friend has been trying to keep it warm; so that really by the time it is exposed and serviceable, you have come to wish you had never disturbed its slumbers, and to feel you

have only prolonged and intensified your own suffering by calling for a remedy so awkward, and so thoroughly out-of-the-way.

Instantly Lord Barton detected that this was a time for condolence, and not for loud rejoicings over good marriage-settlements. What matter if Mr. Segrave had to sit a little longer over the cutlet and glass of sherry he had been invited to discuss? Eleanor's little bit of sentiment must be answered and attended to. It deserved quite as much consideration at that moment as any question of pounds, shillings, and pence.

Yes, those were the letters from the buried love of her youth; and that was the miniature of the handsome soldier who had died in foreign climes. Lord Barton took it all in and for a moment paused, during which pause you could see that he had entirely laid aside the matter he had come about—had completely shifted his attention round to Eleanor's point of view, and was ready to be the true friend and the wise brother.

"Have you told Falkener of that passage of your youth, and of your former engagement?"

"No, I have never spoken to him about it. He has always been our neighbour, even before he was what he is now; and the affair was too well known in the county for it to be any secret to him. Why, you know, dear Edward, my wedding-day was all but fixed when the news of poor Frank's death reached us. I should, in talking to him about it, acquaint him him with nothing new. And of course, knowing I was engaged to be married, he will suppose that man had my first and certainly my deepest love," she added, as two large tear-drops fell on her white hands, folded upon the precious packet.

"Would you shrink from speaking to him about it, my dear?"

"Oh! yes, very much. You see, Edward, there is such a difference. I mean to be happy, and I do care for John, and all that; but you can understand it is not, of course, what I once looked for, and once expected; and I a little bit

cling to these relics of a brighter and more congenial past."

Lord Barton looked at her for a moment, and thought to himself how true is the old French proverb, "Le passé n'est pas mort, il n'est qu'absent." And the conviction rapidly rushed over him of how entirely Eleanor's old nature was the same as in years gone by. She had covered it over, as we have already said, with habits of out-of-door exercise, of hard, practical sense, and of strong womanly activity; and she had apparently transformed herself, from what she had been as the beautiful girl of nineteen, deeply in love and engaged to be married to Frank Molyneux. But nature is stronger than habit; and still more so than art. And now when she was just touching on the very consummation most to be desired, and most reasonably to be expected after the years of self-training she had given herself, there started up the original spring of her character, the substratum of her nature, as real as ever, though so long kept out of sight, and testified to the

fact that Eleanor at thirty would have been quite as capable of a deep, intense, passionate love-story as she had been at nineteen, had only circumstances come before her in any other shape than that of John Falkener.

Lord Barton honoured her for it, and in her he honoured human nature, and especially woman's nature; and with the large, loving benevolence of his own rich heart, he said to himself, "How much better, deeper, and nobler most people are than they ever seem to be." At once he was prepared to treat Eleanor's sentiment with respect, upon the grand principle that if it be true that we are immortal, then is our past sacred as well as our present; for when we shall look back on our life in the light of eternity we shall see the whole laid out as a chart before us, and we shall judge every portion by its intrinsic merit, and not by its mere relation to time. The sorrows and joys of childhood will then in their degree be as real as the struggles and hopes of mature age; we shall see and understand their bear-

ings on our character and on our destiny, and as the long chain of little and great events is unrolled before us, we shall comprehend how all our life, which to us seems so broken and disjointed, has in fact hung together with a real and logical sequence, every part of which has been planned or permitted by the God who gave it.

"There is something a little awkward, Eleanor, in keeping love-letters and a picture about which you do not like to speak to your husband. I don't for a moment mean you have not a perfect right to them—nor that you need mind talking the matter over with him; only, as you do mind it, and do not intend to allude to the subject, it would perhaps secure you against some possible mischance if you consented to put those relics of the past out of your own keeping."

"You mean," she said, "that you would keep them for me?"

"Of course I would. I would put them apart as belonging to you, and to be given un-

opened to you, in case of my death. Then you could once again do what you please about them. Only, you see, this entails your not being able to return to them from time to time, as I find you doing now."

"I think, Edward, that once married to John, I should probably not wish to return to them again—nay, I am sure I should not, although I do not like the idea of destroying them; and so I will give them all up to you. Perhaps some day I may speak to John about the past, and then I may possibly come to you to claim my poor treasures."

She gathered up the relics neatly and swiftly, her lips quivering the while, and her eyes moist with unshed tears. Lord Barton waited till it was done, and then returned in a graver tone to the subject which had brought him to his sister's room. Eleanor listened, approved, and was grateful. For a moment she hinted that Mr. Falkener was doing too much, and that she could not accept such liberality. But Lord Barton took quite another view of the subject, and

we need hardly add that his prevailed. He represented to her that Falkener having only one child by his first wife, and no dowager mother, or maiden sisters who drew annuities from the estate, was perfectly able to be liberal to his second wife. Besides she might, very probably would, survive him; and it was important she should with advancing years be supplied with the comforts and luxuries she was accustomed to; as also that she should feel quite independent of Falkener's heir, that young Mr. Charles in Jamaica, of whom they knew literally nothing, and who might be, and was very probably, no better than a snob.

Eleanor was not inclined to dispute any of these opinions, and, on the contrary, felt glad she had her brother to settle the matter for her, and clench the question of her possible future in so satisfactory a way. Lord Barton wrote in her presence a graceful note to thank Mr. Falkener, and added a pleased and affectionate message from Eleanor; and then left her to send back Mr. Segrave with his schedule of

the settlement fully endorsed and approved.

While this little family scene was going on at Hurstfield, Mr. Falkener was sitting at home in his study, concocting a not very readily written epistle to his son in Jamaica. It cannot be the easiest thing in the world to tell your grown-up "boy" that having buried his mother a little over two years, you are about at the mature age of fifty or thereabouts, to unite yourself to a young woman of thirty; and probably confer on him some half-dozen brothers and sisters. It is quite as open to the boy to feel hurt on his own or his mother's account, as to welcome the second mistress of his father's house; and it is always possible for a son, especially an only son, to make things disagreeable.

Notwithstanding these nervous impressions which more or less haunted Mr. Falkener, he had no very decided fear but that all would go well, so far as Charles was concerned. The elder man was very nearly free from one of the faults which belong to the race above him in birth

and equal to him in fortune. There was but little of that jealousy of the first-born which is apt to mark and disfigure those who have for many generations come to their privileges through the great condescension of allowing themselves to be born. We believe it to be peculiar to the aristocracy of England for the father to be jealous of his heir. It certainly is unknown in those countries which we are fond of stigmatising as, in comparison with ourselves, but little acquainted with the delights of domestic life.

We have already said that John Falkener had not been desirous of his son's return home, because he liked to act without reference to another. But the hereditary jealousy which makes the English father look on his grown-up successor somewhat in the light of a natural enemy, was wanting to John's unaristocratic blood, as it generally is to self-made men. The man who by his talents or his energy has created for himself a great position is proud of having to leave it to his son; and in all his dealings

with him is conscious of the favours he will have it in his power to bestow; and is assured beforehand of a certain amount of gratitude. We love those on whom we confer benefits. But the feeling is a different one when you only transmit to a necessary heir the goods you yourself received in the same irresponsible manner. The father then is tempted to look on his first-born as hungering for his empty place; and even though it may in individual cases be a question of degree, the chief advantages of the father's position will inevitably descend to the son; who thus through life assumes some of the aspects of a rival. Is it a necessary evil growing out of the many advantages of an hereditary aristocracy? And did it exist in a sister land before the equal division of property was established by a revolutionary law?

John Falkener was not a man to stand hesitating either before a cold bath or a difficult letter. And the day that Mr. Segrave had gone over to Hurstfield saw the following epistle put into the post for the Jamaica mail:—

"MY DEAR CHARLES,

"I was very glad to receive, by last mail, your account of the improved culture of those coffee plantations in the west which, in my cousin Jackson's time, seemed to produce so little. Poor Jackson was apt to adopt a niggardly way with land, and that is of no use at all when it is a question of reclaiming and utilizing what has hitherto been nearly waste ground. I always calculate here in England that when I mean to reclaim waste, I must put three years' profit into the land before I count upon getting one out. I suppose in Jamaica, where you have a light soil, and where your chief, and in this case your sole, object is one particular crop, you find you can do it at a lesser outlay. But my statement will show you that I am prepared to find the improvement you have made has not been without its cost. You will probably give me further particulars by next mail.

"And now I must inform you of an approaching event which very nearly concerns me, but

which I have not thought it necessary to allude to while it was still undecided. You remember, no doubt, Miss Eleanor Barton, the sister of our neighbour at Hurstfield? You were too young when you were last at home to form any opinion of the lady's merits, beyond the fact that she was handsome and amiable. But I, meanwhile, have been a good deal at Lord Barton's house, and the intimacy I formed with Miss Barton has led to my making that lady an offer of marriage, which she has done me the honour to accept. She has a handsome fortune of her own, and I have enough to double it, without in any way interfering with your future prospects, which will be as good as any man need desire or expect.

"In taking this serious step I feel I am paying tribute to the judgment of your excellent mother, who always considered Miss Barton with a sincere regard. I may say I believe myself to be doing that which, could she still convey to me her excellent advice, she would be the first to counsel. There is, of course, a

certain disparity in our ages, but as Miss Barton is good enough to overlook this, I have only reason to be content. As there will be no difficulties about the marriage settlements, I am in hopes this affair will come off in about a month's time. Miss Barton has requested me to say with what pleasure she will look forward to renewing your acquaintance.

"And now, to turn to your own prospects, and your future, in which you may be assured I am as interested as ever. My impression is that you had better come back to England as soon as you can see your way to winding up your affairs sufficiently to leave everything safely in the hands of Williams, whom you tell me you have found so efficient a man of business. I feel sure you have spent time enough in those outlandish parts; and though I should hesitate very seriously about recalling you, unless I saw (from all you have told me) a sure prospect of the estates being well managed in your absence, yet I must own I am anxious to see you back again in scenes more

congenial to my own tastes, and more fitted for the position which, as my eldest and at present only son, you must necessarily occupy in the county. You will see that I am actuated by no selfish feelings when I add to this the expression of my sincere wish that you should yourself think about settling, and taking a wife suited to your present status and future prospects. Of course everything is entirely and absolutely in my own power; but I am too much of a true-born Englishman not to honour the rights of primogeniture, and to wish to establish them, even in connection with a property where, as in this case, they do not already exist. It is therefore, my dear Charles, very advisable that you should come to England. I do not say necessarily that you should come here permanently. Your own good taste will show you that, at the present moment, it is not desirable for all parties. But if you return, as I beg, and, indeed, desire you will do, you will find me willing to make all such arrangements as are necessary for your living as be-

comes my son. To facilitate this I am anxious that you, too, should marry. I did not marry very early in life myself, but my position then was very different from what yours is; and on the whole, when a man has fortune, and can command position, I think it advisable he should settle at about four or five-and-twenty. I need hardly add that there is one condition which I should consider a *sine qua non* to any alliance you might wish to contract. I look to you to strengthen the family by alliances with persons of birth. You understand me. I am doing that myself in the marriage now before me. I could not in any way, or under any circumstances, countenance your not following the same example. Your mother was an excellent woman, but she had not those advantages which I am now securing to my house, and which I expect my son to ratify in any matrimonial alliance he may propose. For this reason, if for no other, it is highly desirable you should come away from Jamaica, where a young man like you may be exposed to many temptations, and

where a marriage such as I should approve of is utterly and absolutely out of the question. Let me hear from you by the next mail, and believe me to remain,

"Your affectionate father,

"J. FALKENER."

"Do not forget to send a suitable message to the lady who probably, by the time your letter reaches me, will be your step-mother; and mind you bring her as handsome a present as you can find from Jamaica."

The letter was put into the letter-bag and went its way. It dropped from thence into the vast circulation of hopes and fears, of joy and anguish, which civilization has set flowing and streaming all over the world. Like the life-blood in our veins, it goes its hidden course as noiselessly and scarcely less certainly. And like the life-blood, it makes not one but millions of hearts beat, and carries health or disease unerringly to its destination. Floods of letters pour through our ports, floods of letters pour

out of them; and the same everywhere. When we settle in a new place our first question is, How many posts out, and how many posts in? Nothing stops the torrent; nothing even checks it, save a general war. Until at last the aged and the experienced, who have gone through many years of this postal calamity, come to sigh for the good old times when the large, square, folded, and carefully sealed missive arrived as a rare and great event, and cost a shilling or eighteenpence on delivery. There were not so many people died of heart disease in those days.

We will leave the letter on its voyage across the Atlantic, and will stay awhile behind to watch the progress of our two sensible lovers.

The preparations for the great event were continued with unremitting energy. Eleanor herself seemed anxious to get it over, and was at times a little irritable over the details necessarily connected with *trousseaux* and settlements. The fact was that the glamour of young love

was wanting to prevent mere business questions from being tedious, and to give a subtle sense to ceremonies which without it seemed unmeaning. She wanted to dispense with wedding-cake, and with some difficulty was induced to wear a proper maiden's veil instead of walking into church in an ordinary bonnet.

Falkener would have preferred the wedding taking place in London; he had a fancy for St. George's, and the sound thereof in the *Morning Post*. But the season of the year, late in the Autumn, forbade that. There was positively no one in London; and in the absence of all society the great town had put on her night-cap of thick fog, and laid down her carpet of mud. It would have been an altogether unfashionable thing to be married in London at the fag end of October; and so he was consoled by several illustrious members of the Barton family congregating at Hurstfield; and though Eleanor could not by any amount of entreaty be induced to have a train of six or eight bridesmaids, yet the two she selected

were not only intimate friends, but were to be found in the British *livre d'or*, with an orthodox handle to their names—all of which was highly satisfactory to Mr. Falkener.

Eleanor was shrewd enough to discover the importance he attributed to these things, and in proportion became more obviously indifferent. Of course he had not the tact to perceive the impression his fussiness on these questions made on her, for vulgarity does not know itself. But on one occasion she had so far lost her temper in consequence of some of his remarks as to exclaim—

"I do wish, John, you would not think so much about those things."

"What things?" asked the disconcerted man, quite startled by Eleanor's flushing cheeks.

"I mean things connected with being of rank, or what you call fashion. *We* don't talk of them."

"No, Eleanor, because you are born to them. They are comparatively new to me—I mean as

in any way possessing them, which I shall do when you are mine. You must pardon me, therefore, if, being but a country booby as I am, I seem to put too much value on them."

The confession was made so naturally and so quietly, that it amounted to being dignified; and ever after Eleanor indulged his fancies as well as she could, and tried to screen his underbred admiration for high-breeding by doing the thing she knew he would prefer, before he had time to talk about it. And so by dint of always screening him, she learnt to be no longer irritated by him.

Lord Barton had watched the process, and was so satisfied with his sister that he too learnt to put up with his brother-in-law. He had foreseen these little discrepancies more accurately than Eleanor had done, and having taken them from the first for granted had imagined she would do the same. But it is just one of those points in which women have more difficulty in roughing it than men.

The guests were invited, and amongst them,

as old cronies of Lord Barton's, Colonel Malcolm, Captain Burrows, and Mr. Pibrock. The former refused, sputtering a good deal as he read the note of invitation, which he looked on rather as adding insult to injury. He had hoped for quite a different termination to his frequent Autumn visits to Hurstfield; and having been really as serious in his regard for Eleanor as his nature admitted of, he would have found it impossible to stand by calmly and witness her giving herself away elsewhere, merely out of regard for the family and admiration for Lord Barton's good dinners. Love was not perhaps all in all in his past calculations with respect to Eleanor; but at least he had cared for her in a half-chivalrous and entirely military way, such as might be expected from a well-known officer in Her Majesty's service who had won his Crimean medals. Therefore he briefly and coldly declined, sending at the same time a very handsome inkstand to the bride, and going himself down to his brother's parsonage, where he frequently resorted when life went a little

awry with him; and where he sipped his morning coffee in a handsome dressing-gown and slippers, smoked a soothing meerschaum, dined in a shooting-jacket, and was altogether a very different man from the Colonel Malcolm whom Eleanor had seen directing his eye-glass towards her from the omnibus-box of the 10th Hussars, or handing her into her carriage at the Birthday Drawing-room, which he so scrupulously attended year after year. In London he was essentially the military man; at the Reverend John Malcolm's, Winchgreen Parsonage, another side of his character turned up; and the London side was a myth to the Reverend John, quite as entirely as the Winchgreen Rectory side was undreamt of by Eleanor. He stayed a week with the parson while that distressing affair was going on at Hurstfield; and he talked a great deal more about tithes, glebe-land, and church-rates, than John had ever known him do before. The parson was delighted to find his brother, who he was sometimes tempted to fear was, after all, of the

nature of a great London sinner, in so healthy a frame of mind; and began wondering whether he might not be induced to leave the army, rent a small country place near him, and keep sheep. It would be such an advantage to the parish, and so pleasant to poor John.

Captain Burrows was far from taking a melancholy view of the transaction. He was quite willing to dance a horn-pipe at Miss Barton's wedding; and if he had ever fancied he might have been in John's place, the palpable fact that he was not there put it out of his head at once. He had such a ready knack of accepting the inevitable that he entirely forgot he had ever had other views. He had brought some beautiful birds with him from his last voyage, and their plumage was made up into banner-screens for the bride, while his pleasure in giving them put all other thoughts out of his head.

Very different were the sentiments and line of conduct adopted by Mr. Theophilus Pibrock. As a poet, a writer of sensational novels,

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Barton's cellars were famous. These objects are often more necessary to literary men than they are to more ordinary mortals. There is the wear and tear of brain to be made up for, and there is a certain sensuous view of the goods the gods send us, which, as the taste of the day requires it to shine in our literature, it is as well to experience before describing it.

Besides these admirable reasons, there was a future before Mr. Theophilus Pibrock; for who is without his future, whether horizoned by the banqueting board, the wool-sack, or a retiring pension? Moreton Moat would be a pleasant country house to lounge into when the annual visit to Hurstfield was over. The library was as good, so was the claret, and if he had any influence, so should be the cuisine.

It was a perspective, and might lead to more; and thus it proved that most of our friends sang "Haste to the wedding," though all to different tunes.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.